# OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL

Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AT ALL COSTS THE MAIL MUST BE SAVED.

*Over the Rockies with the Air Mail.* *Frontispiece.*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

# OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL

## OR

## TED SCOTT LOST IN THE WILDERNESS

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS,"
"RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS," "THE HARDY
BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE OLD MILL," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED BY*

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# BOOKS FOR BOYS

**By FRANKLIN W. DIXON**

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## THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
Or Ted Scott, Hero of the Air
OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
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# OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL

## CHAPTER I

### A Daring Venture

"I'll give you two hundred dollars to take me over to Lumberport in your plane."

The speaker was a tall, professional-looking man with a finely chiseled face and piercing black eyes. A keen observer, viewing the long, powerful, yet sensitive hands, would have classed him as a surgeon, the impression being emphasized by the oblong black case that he carried in his right hand.

He had addressed his remarks, spoken in a nervous, incisive tone, to a young man in an aviator's suit who was standing by a monoplane on the flying field at Denver.

The airman, a lithe, muscular young fellow, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on the frame that was surmounted by a well-shaped head, from which looked out a pair of frank brown eyes, shook his head.

"Can't do it," he said decisively and yet regretfully. "It would be as much as one's life was worth to go up in the teeth of a howling gale like this."

"I'll make it five hundred," snapped the first speaker, as he nervously clenched his fist in agitation. "I tell you I've got to get to Lumberport."

"I'm not trying to hold you up," responded the aviator. "I'd take you for the two hundred, if I took you at all. It isn't a question of money. It's a question of life. You see what a gale is blowing. Even on the ground, you can scarcely keep your feet. No plane could live in it."

It was indeed a fearful wind that was sweeping the plateau that served as a flying field. The temperature was close to zero, and the gale bit into the very marrow of the bones. The low-lying clouds that hung in ominous masses above them were full of snow.

Even now, a flurry of white flakes was scudding over the field, and to the experienced eye of the aviator it was plain that a blizzard was impending.

"But I am willing to risk it," pleaded the would-be voyager.

"That may be," was the reply. "You may have sufficient reasons. But the only reason I would have would be the money that you offer.

No amount of money is enough to tempt me to commit suicide."

"But you don't understand, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Scott is my name," replied the young fellow.

"Not Ted Scott, the Scott who flew over the Atlantic?" exclaimed the man with a sudden quickening of interest and also of hope.

"Yes," replied the young fellow simply.

"Then I know that you will do what I ask you to do," cried the man eagerly.

Ted smiled.

"I don't exactly follow your reasoning," he replied. "What has my flying over the Atlantic got to do with carrying you to Lumberport?"

"Because your flight to Paris showed that you had in you the stuff of which heroes are made," was the quick reply. "The man who risked his life for glory won't hesitate to risk it again to save a human life."

"A life!" exclaimed Ted, quickened to attention. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just this," was the reply. "My name is Yaley, Doctor Yaley."

Ted recognized the name at once as that of the most distinguished surgeon and specialist in that section of the country.

"I just got a telegram from Maxwell Bruin of Lumberport," went on Dr. Yaley rapidly,

"telling me that his son, Frank, had been seriously injured in a smash-up. The local doctor who attended him advised that I be sent for, as a prompt operation is the only thing that will save his life. It's a matter of hours, perhaps of minutes. Everything depends on speed. The mountain roads are blocked and the only way I can hope to get there in time is by plane. Now you understand. Will you take me?"

There was a deadly earnestness in the doctor's words, and the eyes were as eloquent as the tone.

Ted had been thinking quickly. He knew that if he acceded to the surgeon's appeal he would be undertaking one of the most dangerous adventures of his life. None knew better than he the peril of going up in an airplane in that terrific gale. He had not exaggerated when he had referred to it as possible suicide.

Two minutes before he had been firm in his determination not to go. Now the situation had been entirely changed. A human life was in the balance!

He looked at the surgeon. The stricken patient was no kin of his. The man of science could easily have shrugged his shoulders and have said that it was impossible for him to go. Yet, from sheer professional ethics, a com-

pelling sense of duty, this man was willing to take the same desperate chance that he was asking Ted to accept.

Ted's resolution was swiftly taken. It was a challenge at once to his humanity and his sporting blood. He took up the challenge.

"I'll take you," he said.

The surgeon's eyes glistened.

"I knew that Ted Scott would not refuse when he knew the facts," he said simply.

Ted gave a call, and several fellow pilots and mechanics who had been toasting themselves by a warm fire in a near-by building came running out.

"Give me a hand, will you, fellows?" asked Ted. "Help me run the machine back to the filling station so that I can fill the tank. I'm nearly out of gasoline."

They gazed at the daring young aviator open-eyed.

"What's the big idea, Ted?" asked Ed Allenby, an old comrade of Ted's who had been associated with him some time before in the Mississippi flood relief work.

"You don't mean that you're going to take the air with this gale blowing, do you?" queried Bill Twombley, with incredulity in his voice.

"You guessed it the first time," replied Ted. "Don't talk, fellows, but help me roll this plane

back. I'll tell you about it while the tank is filling."

They did as he requested, but they kept looking at him as though they thought he had suddenly gone crazy.

"But, Ted," protested Roy Benedict, while the tank was being replenished, "don't tell me in dead earnest that you're deliberately going to throw away your life. Think, man, think!"

"I have thought, Roy," replied Ted. "I know the danger as well as you do. But I've made up my mind, and there's no use talking about it."

He hurriedly sketched out the substance of his talk with the surgeon.

"If that fellow is willing to take such a chance from sheer humanity, I'm game enough to help him," he finished.

His comrades were impressed but not convinced.

"'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,'" quoted Ed Allenby. "The doc is plucky. I'm handing it to him. But all the same he doesn't know how dangerous it really is. He isn't an airman. He thinks that, if he has Ted Scott with him, he's sure to get through."

"And so he is, if it's humanly possible," conceded Bill Twombley. "But even Ted Scott can't work miracles; and it won't be much less

than a miracle if he takes that plane over the mountains in a blow like this."

"The plane will be tossed about like a chip in the rapids," prophesied Roy Benedict. "How in the world, Ted, are you going to keep it on an even keel? It can't be done."

"It isn't only the wind," added Ed. "Look at those clouds. They're just packed with snow. Some of it's coming down already. If we're not in for the worst blizzard of the winter, I miss my guess. How are you going to steer? You won't be able to see twenty yards ahead of you in the blinding snow."

These men, all hardy and experienced aviators, knew what they were talking about, and Ted knew that they did. But when he had once made up his mind he was adamant.

"No use, boys," he said. "I'm going."

He beckoned to Dr. Yaley, who had been standing at a little distance during this conversation and who had fearfully watched Ted's face for some sign of weakening.

"This way, Doctor," said Ted. "Boys, will a couple of you strap a pair of parachutes on his back? I hope you won't need them, Doctor," he added, with a smile; "but if you do, you'll find them mighty handy."

"I imagine so," Dr. Yaley answered, as he submitted to having the life-saving apparatus adjusted. "This is my first experience in an

airplane, and I don't want it to be my last."

"You stand a mighty good chance of having it be just that," grumbled Bill, who, despairing of any success with Ted, now turned his guns on the doctor as a last resort. "You've got just about one chance in a hundred of pulling through. It's too risky a gamble, Doctor, for both of you."

"It's tough, of course, on the young fellow," put in Ed. "But that's his hard luck. What's the use of two dying in trying to save one? And after all, you'll never get there."

"That is as it may be," returned the doctor dryly. "As for me, my mind is made up. But Mr. Scott still has the right to refuse to go if he wants to."

"I've passed my word, and I'm not in the habit of going back on it," replied Ted. "Hurry up, fellows, with those parachutes, will you?"

"Of all the stubborn—oh, well, what's the use?" exclaimed Roy Benedict despairingly.

With worried faces, Ted's faithful friends did as he requested. They adjusted the parachutes and then helped push the plane to the runway.

The doctor climbed in and Ted followed.

"Good-by boys," he said, as he pulled his helmet more tightly over his head. "Don't think for a minute that I don't appreciate your

anxiety for me. No fellow ever had better pals. But I've simply got to make the attempt to go."

He settled himself at the controls and gave the signal. Bill Twombley started the motor going, Ed and Roy knocked away the blocks in front of the machine, and the *Hapworth* roared down the runway, hesitated a moment, as though it, too, knew the awful risk its master was taking, and then soared into the skies.

Bill, Roy and Ed watched it with blanched faces.

"They'll never get through alive," groaned Bill.

## CHAPTER II

### Fighting the Gale

"They'll never get through alive!"

Was Bill Twombley's gruesome prophecy to be justified?

As a matter of fact, Ted Scott had the same conviction. He knew the odds were heavily against him. But his blood was up, and he never regretted his decision for an instant.

He glanced at the man beside him. The doctor's face was pale, but his eyes did not waver nor his lips tremble. The thought came to Ted that, if he forfeited his life in this wild venture, he would at least die in good company.

The doctor's lips moved. He was saying something, but he could not be heard above the roar of the motor.

Ted shook his head to indicate that conversation was impossible, and then devoted all his thought to the guidance of his machine.

If the wind had been a following one, Ted could simply have scudded before it and tried to keep on an even keel. But it seemed to come

from all quarters of the compass, and from time to time the *Hapworth* was whirled about in it like a dancing dervish.

Ted dived and rose again, trying to find some stratum of air that was less furiously agitated. But whether he flew at a height of two thousand or ten thousand feet seemed to make no difference. The gale that day was equally fierce at all altitudes.

Ted had breasted many a gale, but never any one like this. At every moment he feared to hear some sound of tearing, to see some support give way in the unbridled fury of the elements.

And now, to make it worse, the snow was falling heavily. It formed an impenetrable veil before his eyes.

A veil! Was it perhaps a shroud? Was Bill's prophecy to be fulfilled?

He could not see twenty feet ahead of him. He might as well have been blind. He had to depend entirely upon his instruments.

And now even they were acting strangely. His altimeter seemed to be out of order. He noted that when he dived and when he soared the indicator scarcely moved.

Had he been traveling over level country, this would not so much have mattered, though even then he would have been in peril from the tops of trees.

But he was in a mountainous country, where sometimes the crags rose to a height of ten thousand feet. Should he strike one of these, death would come on the instant.

Even as this thought appalled him, a gust of the gale drove a rift through the snow, and in that vista he saw before him a black, savage mass of rock toward which he was driving with twice the speed of an express train!

While Ted is struggling desperately at his controls, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Ted was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted Scott's knowledge of his origin, of his parents, was of the slightest. His first conscious memory went back to the time when he found himself in the care of James and Miranda Wilson, a worthy couple whose hearts had been touched by the plight of the little waif and who had taken him into their household.

They treated him kindly and sent him to school. But when he was ten years old the Wilsons died, within a few months of each other, leaving no property of any account. But again Ted found friends, this time Eben and Charity Browning, who were themselves childless and welcomed the forlorn little fellow into their hearts and home. He became as dear to them

as though he had been their own, and he on his part returned their devotion with the same affection he would have rendered to his own parents.

Eben Browning kept a hotel, the Bromville House, in the town of the same name. At one time, it had been the leading place of its kind in the township. Eben, shrewd, kindly, humorous, with a fund of homely anecdote, had been a great favorite with the traveling men who put up at his hotel. He had a large clientage also among fisherman who came to indulge their favorite sport in the waters of the Rappock River, famous for its trout.

But changes came in the town. The Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation established there a mammoth plant for the manufacture of airplanes. This provided employment for an army of workmen, and Bromville blossomed out as a thriving city.

With its growth came more hotels, up-to-date establishments with which the old Bromville House, now grown shabby, could not compete. From affectionate habit and old times' sake, a certain portion of Eben's clientage, especially the fishermen, still clung to the old place. But the traveling men gradually took up their quarters in the newer hostelries for their own greater comfort and for the prestige of their firms.

The greatest blow came to Eben's tottering fortunes when the Hotel Excelsior was erected. It was a luxurious, palatial structure, sumptuously furnished, that would have graced a metropolitan city. It had broad grounds exquisitely laid out, marble verandas, a band pavilion and all the other attributes of a great caravansary. In connection with the hotel was a superb golf course that drew golfers to compete in tournaments from all parts of the country.

Against the proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior, Brewster Gale, Eben had a special grievance. He, Eben Browning, had once owned all the land on which the Hotel Excelsior now stood, as well as that on which the golf links had been laid out. Gale, a heavy-jowled, unscrupulous man who had amassed a fortune by ways that could not stand inspection but had not yet landed him in jail, secured the property from Eben.

The deal, which seemed straightforward, called for a stated price that would have given the latter a comfortable fortune. But, apart from the few hundred dollars paid down to seal the contract, Eben Browning had never received a cent of the promised purchase price. By the aid of conscienceless layers and a bewildering amount of legal hocus pocus—reorganizations, holding companies and the like—

Eben had been frozen out and Gale was riding on the crest of the wave with what seemed to be a clear title to the property.

The old man had raved and protested, but he had no money to fight Gale in a contest that might be drawn out for years. Bewildered and hopeless, he had practically given up the struggle and devoted himself to trying to make a living out of his hotel. But he was working against odds, and he was tormented by the fear of bankruptcy and dependence in his old age.

Ted Scott, as he grew older, did all he could to help about the place, painting and repairing, but its fortunes steadily dwindled. When the Aero Plant was established, Ted secured a job there, and his industry and skill and a special aptitude for mechanics advanced him rapidly until he was getting good wages. Almost all of this he turned in each week to the old folks to keep the wolf from the door.

His work among airplanes, of which he soon mastered every feature, quickened in him a desire he had long cherished to fly. The determination that he would learn to be an aviator came to a head one day when a flying circus came to town. Ted was thrilled by the daring and skill of the airmen, and from that time on his vocation was fixed in his mind.

At this juncture he made two warm friends who were able to advance his ambitions. One

was Paul Monet, a Frenchman by birth, but for a long time resident in America, whose life Ted had saved on the day of the flying circus by dragging him out of the way of an airplane that was making a landing. The other was Walter Hapworth, a wealthy young business man and golf expert, who had visited the works of the Aero Corporation and had been amazed by Ted's familiarity with everything pertaining to planes.

These two men learned of the lad's longing to be an aviator and offered to supply money enough to pay for his course in the flying school. Ted accepted, on condition that the money should be only a loan to be repaid later. He went to the school and, during a course that involved many thrilling adventures, became one of its most proficient pupils.

Then he entered the air mail service, his route being a night one between St. Louis and Chicago. His daring, his quick thinking, and his unfailing courage in an emergency soon gained him a reputation.

The papers about that time were rife with details of the offer of a twenty-five thousand dollar prize to the airman who should first make a non-stop flight between New York and Paris. Several men of international reputation had already entered for the prize, and excitement was at fever heat.

Ted Scott longed to enter the competition, but as that would involve the expenditure of many thousands of dollars for a plane and expenses, it seemed impracticable. Mr. Hapworth, stopping off on a journey from the Pacific Coast, learned of Ted's desires and offered to build him a plane and provide the other necessary funds.

Ted accepted and went to San Francisco, and there, in an airplane factory in which Mr. Hapworth had a controlling interest, supervised the building of a monoplane, which he named after his benefactor. When it was ready, he jumped into the cockpit and headed for New York, from which city, after he had completed all preparations, he planned to take off for Paris.

How in the haze of a rainy morning Ted mounted into the skies for his flight to Europe —the fog and sleet and storm with which he battled over the surging wastes of the Atlantic —the final swooping down of the lone eagle on Paris—the tremendous ovations that greeted him there and which reached their climax on his return to his native country where he was enshrined as a national idol—all is told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris; or, Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight."

After the great receptions in Washington and New York, Ted returned to Bromville,

where the old home town went wild over him. There he consulted with Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet about his future course.

There were other matters, too, in which his interests were linked with those of these trusted friends. They had invested heavily in the golf course project and had reason to believe that Brewster Gale, the treasurer of the company that financed the course, was indulging in fraudulent practices. Their suspicions were increased when Ted told them of how Gale had cheated Eben Browning out of his property. Mr. Hapworth immediately ordered his own lawyers, who were already working on the golf course matter, to search into the intricacies of the Browning case.

They reported that Gale's transactions with Eben Browning had been tainted with perjury and that they only needed a certain witness and a couple of missing documents to make an iron-clad case against him.

Ted had incurred Gale's deadly enmity, and the two sons of the rascally father, Gregory and Duckworth—Greg and Duck for short—took up the paternal quarrel.

On a tour at the head of a flying circus for the benefit of the Bromville hospital, Ted came across an old Bromville resident, who gave him a clue to the missing witness in the Gale case. It was rather indefinite, pointing simply to

Arkansas as the present residence of the man wanted, but it narrowed the field of search, which had hitherto embraced all the South.

At that time the Mississippi was on a rampage and the worst flood in history was devastating the valley. Ted volunteered as an aviator in the Red Cross and went South, where he chanced to be assigned to the Arkansas district.

What valor he displayed in that fight with the mad waters—the daring rescues he made at the risk of his life—the thrilling adventures that came to him in the course of his task—how he flew to the aid of two aviators in a burning plane high in the skies—how he came across Major Claiborne, the missing witness—all is told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "Rescued in the Clouds; or, Ted Scott, Hero of the Air."

Following his return from the flooded district, Ted's thoughts turned to his first love, the air mail service. He saw tremendous possibilities in this and also in the matter of commercial transportation that, he thought, was about ripe for an enormous development. In order to learn at first hand and by practical experience all that was contained in this, he took up the work on the most dangerous section of the whole system—that which involved flight over the Rocky Mountains. The love of

adventure was in his blood, but, combined with this, was the passion to perfect himself in his chosen calling. A man who could master the Rockies could well be called a finished aviator.

Now to return to Ted Scott as he peered with strained eyes through the snow at the black mass of rock toward which his plane was driving.

He saw in an instant that he could not rise high enough to clear that towering peak in time and that, if he struck it, he, his passenger, and the plane would be smashed to bits.

He glanced to right and left.

At the left the rock extended as far as he could see. No hope there!

But at the right he discerned an opening where the peak made a sudden descent. It was fearfully narrow, for, just beyond, another crag upreared itself.

Could he make the passage? He *must* make it!

With an unuttered prayer he turned the plane to the right.

Like an arrow it shot through the narrow gorge, one end of the wing barely grazing the edge of the cliff.

There was an involuntary gasp on the part of the doctor, but beyond that he gave no sign.

Rigid as a statue, Ted sat at the controls, a touch here and a touch there guiding the plane

through the narrow defile, until, where it widened for an instant, he turned the nose upward and rose into the higher spaces.

Up and up he continued soaring until he knew that he was clear of the mountain top. Then for an instant he relaxed.

It had been a terrific test of nerves and skill, but he had conquered. But the strain had been so terrific that, despite the bitter cold, he was drenched with perspiration.

A hundred times that passage might have been tried, and ninety-nine times it would have ended in disaster. His had been the hundredth time.

He wondered whether dear old Charity Browning at home had been praying for him at that moment. He believed she had.

But he had little time to dwell on what was past. The future was the problem. Death had been baffled once, but it was still hovering over him, with claws extended.

The snow storm had now become a blizzard. Sleet was mingled with the snow and was driven against the windows of the cockpit with a force that threatened to break the glass.

Where was he? He did not know.

He had tried to keep account of his instruments, but the *Hapworth* had been driven so many times out of its course, had retreated and advanced, had gone miles to the right, other

miles to the left in that cyclonic gale that accuracy was impossible.

He could only strike an average and make an estimate.

In fair weather, he would have had no difficulty in discarding his instruments altogether, for all the landmarks below were familiar to him and would have guided him infallibly to his destination. But now every well-known object was blotted out by the blinding snow.

He knew, however, by the best information he could gather from the dial plate in front of him, combined with the airman's sure knowledge of distances, that he was somewhere near his goal.

But even when he reached that goal, there would be another problem to be solved.

How and where could he make a landing?

He could not see the ground, and if he descended lower in the attempt to descry it, he might at any instant smash into trees. A curious sound made him tap his gasoline tank. His heart seemed to turn over in his body.

*The tank was almost empty.*

## CHAPTER III

### A Forced Landing

The truth came to Ted Scott like a lightning flash.

His comrades at the flying field had been so engrossed in begging him not to undertake the trip that they had not been as careful as usual in filling the tank. They had shut off the supply sooner than they should have done, with the consequence that now he was nearly out of gas.

Ted's cheeks paled as he realized all that was meant by that nearly empty tank.

It was no longer a matter of choosing his landing. He *must* get down at once.

He tapped the tank once more to estimate the amount still left. It was good at most for a scant five minutes.

He turned the nose of the plane downward.

Whether he was descending toward a mountain gorge, a forest, or a level plain he did not know.

If the first, he and his passenger and the plane were all probably doomed to destruction.

If the second, the plane at least would be smashed and he and his passenger wounded, if not killed. If the third, there was a chance of escape for all.

But in any event, it would be a case of touch and go, with the odds against him.

A clump of great trees loomed up before him. By a lightning touch of the controls he just managed to clear their tops.

But he had noted that the trees were standing up straight. That indicated that they were rooted in a level surface and gave him a gleam of hope.

An especially fierce gust of wind drove the snow aside sufficiently for him to catch a glimpse of what seemed to be a meadow, studded here and there with haystacks.

To thread his way among those stacks would be a superhuman task. But at least they were not rocks, and might yield somewhat to pressure.

Ted drew a long breath and came down in a long, swooping spiral.

He struck the ground, or rather the snow, at as limited a speed as he dared. There was a wild flurry as the *Hapworth* ploughed along, throwing up great clouds of snow that made it impossible for Ted to see where he was going.

Then with a shock that sent their heads awhirl, the machine plunged into a haystack.

bringing down vast masses of blended hay and snow and completely covering the plane.

Throbbing and trembling, the *Hapworth* stood there, while pilot and passenger tried to recover their wits.

Then Ted unstrapped himself from his seat and did the same service for the doctor, and in a moment they had left the plane and were forcing their way through the smothering hay until they had reached the open air.

They drew long breaths and looked at each other.

"Some wild ride," grinned Ted. "But at least we're on the ground. Not a bit too soon, either, for the gas wouldn't have lasted for another minute."

"I had just about said good-by to earth," replied Dr. Yaley. "If you had been any one else than Ted Scott, I think they could have arranged for my funeral. But where are we now? Have you any idea?"

"Not the least," replied Ted. "But let's believe that we're not far from Lumberport. The first thing for us to do is to find the farmer to whom this meadow belongs."

"How?" asked the doctor, trying to peer through the snow that was still falling heavily. "The house may be in one direction just as well as another."

"Right enough," agreed Ted. "But that

seems to be a fence over there. We'll follow that and see where it leads us."

They floundered along, with the fence as a guide, until they came to a gate, just beyond which loomed a big building.

"A barn!" exclaimed Ted. "We've struck it right, after all. The house can't be far off."

They saw it a moment later, a substantial looking structure with the snow piled high on the roof and reaching, where it had drifted, almost to the windows on the second floor.

They made their way to the kitchen door and knocked. The door was opened by a matronly looking woman, who stared at her unexpected visitors with amazement.

"Well, for the land's sake!" she exclaimed, as she noted the aviators' apparel and the parachutes strapped to their backs.

"I don't wonder you're surprised," said Ted, with his inimitable smile. "We've been flying and had to land in one of your fields. We were on our way to Lumberport. Are we anywhere near there?"

"This is Lumberport," she replied. "Leastways, that's our post-office town. But come right in and get warm. You must be nearly frozen."

They followed her gladly into the warm, comfortable kitchen and toasted their numbed fingers at the fire.

"Oh, Pa!" the woman called, and a moment later her husband, a kindly, middle-aged man, came in from an adjoining room.

Explanations were in order and were quickly made.

"Maxwell Bruin!" exclaimed the man, whose name was Wilburton. "Sure, he lives up the road a piece, not more'n half a mile or so. Got the biggest estate in this county. Yes, I heard about young Frank's accident an' that they were expectin' a doctor from Denver. Now you folks just make yourselves comfortable an' I'll hitch up a team in a jiffy an' git you over there. Mighty bad travelin', but we'll make it somehow."

He called his hired man, and they soon had the team ready.

"You'll come along, of course," said the doctor to Ted, as he was about to step into the sleigh.

"I guess not," replied Ted. "Not just yet, anyway. I've got to look after my machine. I'm afraid we've made mutton of that haystack," he said to the farmer, with an apologetic smile.

"That's nothin' at all," replied Mr. Wilburton. "I'm only glad you didn't kill yourselves. You go with Mr. Scott, Jud," he directed the hired man, "an' help him get his machine out and stowed away in the barn. An' of course,"

he added to Ted, "we're aimin' to put you up as long as you can stay with us."

"That's awfully good of you," replied Ted gratefully. "I'll have to get some fuel, and of course there's no starting out again while this storm lasts."

The farmer and the doctor drove off, their progress slow on account of the heavy going.

"I'll go out now and look after my machine," Ted remarked to his hostess.

"You won't do any such a thing—" declared that good woman, "not until I've got something warm inside you. You sit by that fire until I put some hot victuals on the table. You poor thing, flyin' in that awful blizzard! You must be nearly dead."

"Oh, I'm worth a dozen dead men yet," laughed Ted, but yielded, nevertheless, for now that the reaction was on him from his terrific flight he found that he was ravenously hungry.

"You're awful young to be flyin'," the woman remarked. "I suppose you haven't had much experience."

Ted was drinking coffee at the time and almost choked. But he kept a straight face, nevertheless.

"Oh, I've had quite a little experience," he said, as soon as his choking fit had passed.

"Beats all what some of them daredevil fellows will do," she observed. "Seems like it's

flyin' in the face of Providence. There was that one that made the first flight over the Atlantic, that Scott youngster. By the way, he had the same name as yours. You said your name was Scott, didn't you?"

"Yes," replied Ted.

"You ain't any kin of that other Scott, are you?" she asked.

"He's the closest friend I have," answered Ted evasively.

"Do tell!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilburton, with quickened interest. "Then you've seen him, talked with him! Oh, how I wish I could! He's so brave!"

This was getting embarrassing. Ted had hoped to avoid disclosing his identity, for he was tired of being lionized. But he reflected that Dr. Yaley would surely disclose to Mr. Wilburton that the pilot who had brought him over was *the* Ted Scott and the farmer would come home bursting with the news.

"The fact is, Mrs. Wilburton," he said, "that I'm Ted Scott himself."

The good woman's eyes got as big as moons.

## CHAPTER IV

### Snowbound

"Ted Scott! The man the President decorated! The one the whole country went crazy about! And in my house! It seems to me I must be dreaming. Just wait till I tell Pa! He'll be the proudest man in the country!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilburton.

"Probably he knows already," remarked Ted. "Doctor Yaley knew about it."

"And you've shaken hands with kings!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilburton, in tones of awe.

"Yes," smiled Ted. "But I've found that their hands were very much the same as anybody else's. Each one had five fingers."

"I declare, it's a shame that we should keep you here all by ourselves," went on Mrs. Wilburton, beaming. "I must call up the mayor and tell him that you're here. The whole town will go crazy, and they'll give you a great reception."

"No, no! Please don't!" pleaded Ted, in alarm. "I can stay only long enough to get gas and give the storm a chance to let up."

"But they'll never forgive me if I don't tell them," argued Mrs. Wilburton. "How can I explain it?"

"By saying that I had to go and that I left them all my good wishes," replied Ted.

So Mrs. Wilburton had to accede, and perhaps in her secret heart she was not very sorry, for it would give her an exclusive story to tell at the next meeting of the women's club.

"Now, if you don't mind, Mrs. Wilburton," said Ted, "I'll go out and look after my machine."

Accompanied by the hired man, Ted made his way back to where the *Hapworth* stood. Ted was almost afraid to look at his plane, for fear it had sustained some serious damage.

But when the hay and snow had been cleared away, he saw to his delight that, apart from a few inconsequential things that did not affect its flying qualities, the gallant plane was uninjured. Once more it had demonstrated its staunchness and the care with which it had been constructed. Luckily, too, when it had struck the stack it had lost a large part of its momentum and the soft hay had yielded sufficiently to abate the rigor of the shock.

With his mind immeasurably relieved, he, with Jud's aid, wheeled the *Hapworth* over to the barn where he carefully bestowed it.

"Places in town I suppose, Jud, where I can

get gasoline?'' remarked Ted, as, with heads down against the stinging sleet, they made their way back to the house.

''Sure,'' replied Jud. ''There's Bixby's place, not more'n a quarter mile from here. As soon as Mr. Wilburton gets back I'll take the team and go and get you some.''

''Oh, I wouldn't ask anybody to do that for me until this storm lets up a little,'' protested Ted.

''I don't mind it at all,'' replied Jud eagerly. He had listened, open-mouthed, to Ted's conversation with the farmer's wife, and was quite as eager to spread the news abroad as was Mrs. Wilburton. It would be an exciting bit for the gang at the garage that took the place for him that the fortnightly woman's club did to Mrs. Wilburton.

''As you like, then,'' Ted yielded. ''I'll need a full tank of the stuff. I'm not going to be caught short of gas again.''

Ted had not been long in the house before he heard the sound of sleigh bells that heralded Mr. Wilburton's return from the house of Maxwell Bruin.

''I could hardly wait to get back!'' he exclaimed as he came in. ''Why didn't you tell me that you were Ted Scott, young feller? I ain't been so excited for years back as I was when I heard that.''

"I knew the doctor would tell you," laughed Ted. "But, tell me how you found the young fellow that had the accident. Was the doctor in time?"

"Just no more than that, I guess," replied Mr. Wilburton. "He was gettin' ready for the operation when I came away. But he sure looked mighty grave."

"Just what was the accident, anyway?" asked Ted, with interest.

"An auto smash-up," returned the farmer. "You see, this here young feller, Frank, is a regular daredevil. Nice feller an' all that, but just crazy to do things that have danger in 'em. If another feller goes seventy miles an hour, Frank ain't satisfied till he makes eighty. Why, what that feller has done sometimes gives you the creeps to think about! When he goes huntin' he ain't satisfied if he stirs up anything but a grizzly. Understand?"

Ted nodded. He had enough of that in his own nature, though in his case tempered with judgment, to be appreciative of it in another. He began to think that he would like this Frank, if he should ever meet him.

"Well, this time," the farmer went on, "Frank was out on a ride in his car, an' he hadn't any skid chains on, of course. Shucks! He'd think skid chains were a sign of fear. He was a ridin' on a road that ran parallel to

the railroad track, an' when an express train came along nothin' would do but Frank had to up an' give it a race. By jiminy, he was beatin' it, too, when his car skidded an' crashed into a telegraph pole. The car was smashed to bits, an' it looked as if Frank was done for, too, when some men came up that had seen the accident. But they found that there was some breath left in him an' they took him home."

"His poor father is almost crazy," put in Mrs. Wilburton. "Frank's his only son and he's the apple of his eye."

"Bessie will be all broke up when she hears of it, too," ruminated Mr. Wilburton. "She set a heap——"

He stopped at a warning look from his wife.

"Who is Bessie?" asked Ted. "Frank's sister?"

"No," replied the farmer rather awkwardly. "Bessie is our daughter. She's been spendin' a day or two with a girl friend in the next town, an' probably she hasn't heard about the accident. We're expectin' her home some time today—that is, if the storm doesn't keep her."

"You see," explained Mrs. Wilburton, "Bessie and Frank have known each other ever since they were kids together, and of course she'll feel bad to hear of the accident, just as any friend would."

"Naturally," agreed Ted.

"I told Mr. Bruin that we'd 'phone up some time this evenin' an' learn how the operation came out," went on Mr. Wilburton. "By the way, Mr. Scott, he wanted me to tell you how grateful he is to you for taking the risks you did. Said it was magnificent and he'd never forget it. He hopes to see you to thank you personally."

"Oh, that's all right," replied Ted. "The main thing is that the doctor got here. I only hope he got here in time."

"He'll do the job, if anybody can," declared the farmer. "They tell me there ain't a better surgeon——"

"Oh, I believe that's Bessie now!" exclaimed his wife, as they heard a commotion outside.

She jumped to her feet, but before she could get to the door it was opened from the outside, and a pretty girl, her cheeks reddened and her eyes sparkling from the cold, hurried into the room.

"Hello, folks!" she sang out, as she threw an arm about her father's neck and kissed her mother's cheek. "Here I am. Thought the storm would keep me, didn't you? Well, I just wouldn't let——"

She stopped short in surprise as her eyes caught sight of Ted, who had risen.

"Oh, I didn't know you had company!" she exclaimed.

"And such company!" said her mother proudly. "What would you say, Bessie, if I told you that this was Mr. Scott, the Ted Scott that flew over the Atlantic?"

"No?" exclaimed the young girl incredulously. "Oh, Mr. Scott, how delighted I am to meet you. I never expected to have that pleasure."

"My pleasure is the greater at meeting you," responded Ted gallantly, as he took the hand she impulsively extended toward him.

"But how did you get here?" she asked wonderingly. "In all this storm, too!"

She was wonderfully pretty, and her charm was heightened by her present excitement. She had regular features, a complexion that was a blending of peach and olive, and lovely hazel eyes that had intelligence and soul in them as well as beauty.

"Why," replied Ted, feeling instinctively that he ought not to mention the real reason for his being there, "I ran out of gas and had to make a landing somewhere, and that somewhere happened to be in your father's field."

"It's a long story," put in Mrs. Wilburton hastily. "You'll have plenty of time, Bessie dear, to talk to Mr. Scott later. Come upstairs with me now and take off your things."

The young girl obeyed with a quick glance at her mother, as though she sensed that there

was something grave and unusual in her tone.

Mrs. Wilburton came down a little while later, but Bessie was not with her. In fact, it was not until the hour set for supper that the young girl rejoined them.

A mere glance sufficed to tell Ted that she was not the same girl who had burst in so gayly that afternoon. Her eyes were swollen with weeping, and though she had bathed them carefully there was no disguising the fact. She tried to keep up her part of the conversation, but her efforts were palpably forced.

Ted guessed the situation. It was not mere neighborly interest in the welfare of a friend that had brought about such a startling change. He recalled the awkward way the farmer had halted in his speech, the warning look his wife had flashed him.

No, it was not alone a friendly feeling, a sisterly feeling that Bessie Wilburton had for Frank Bruin. It was something far deeper than that!

Ted knew that he had glimpsed a romance. He earnestly hoped that it might not be a tragedy.

By tacit consent, the subject was avoided during the meal. The farm folks questioned Ted about his adventures, and he did his best to make his talk sprightly and entertaining.

After the meal had been concluded and they

had withdrawn into the living room, Bessie ever and again kept glancing at the clock.

Her mother sensed her thoughts and turned to Mr. Wilburton.

"Don't you think, Pa," she asked, "that you'd better call up the Bruins now? You know you said you were goin' to this evening."

"Yes," replied her husband, "I guess I will. They ought to know something definite by this time."

He went to the 'phone and called a number. Bessie stifled a gasp. Her mother put a hand comfortingly over her daughter's.

Ted slipped silently into the dining room. This was a family matter.

"Is that you, Maxwell?" he heard Mr. Wilburton ask. "This is Wilburton. How is Frank? What about the operation?"

There was a period of silence as Mr. Wilburton listened to the voice at the other end of the wire.

## CHAPTER V

### A Kindred Spirit

Ted Scott listened with breathless interest for the verdict that meant so much for this kindly family.

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Wilburton heartily. "Tell him I was asking about him."

He turned to his wife and daughter.

"Doctor says the operation was an entire success," he announced. "Frank will live An' he won't be crippled, either."

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" came from Bessie reverently, and then she broke into a violent storm of weeping.

"There, there, my lamb," soothed her mother, and led the girl from the room. Ted saw her no more that night.

The coast clear, the young aviator slipped back into the living room that now had the farmer as its sole occupant.

"Women is curious creatures," ruminated Mr. Wilburton, blowing his nose vigorously.

As Ted's own experience of women had been

greatly limited, he could only murmur a polite assent.

"Cry when they're sad an' cry when they're glad," continued his host. "How're you goin' to take 'em?"

"Way they're made, I suppose," replied Ted, conscious that the answer was inadequate, but not being able to think of a better.

"Guess the Lord understands them," the farmer dismissed the problem. "It's mighty sure that no man does."

"I'm glad to hear that the young fellow is going to pull through," remarked Ted, trying to direct the conversation into a different channel.

"Yes," replied Mr. Wilburton, "I'm glad for his sake and his father's, too. He sets a mighty heap by that boy of his. Fine old feller, Maxwell Bruin. About the richest man in these parts, an' nobody grudges him his money, for he made it all by good honest work. I knew him when he was in overalls at day's wages. Never puts on any airs; just hail feller well met with everybody. I know you'd like him, if you came to know him. Why don't you run up an' meet him while you're here? He'd be tickled to death to see you. He feels mighty warm toward you for takin' such risks for the sake of his boy."

"I'd like to," replied Ted, "if I had time.

But I'm anxious to get back to my work, and I'm counting on going to-morrow."

"You just get rid of that idea," counseled the farmer. "This blizzard won't let up till to-morrow night, if it does then. So you'll have plenty of time to see Maxwell—Frank, too, if he's strong enough to see anybody."

That the prediction was likely to be fulfilled seemed probable from the way the wind was howling about the house, making it tremble, despite the substantial way in which it was built.

Mrs. Wilburton came in a little while later, her face sad, although she tried to cast off her depression on account of her guest.

Why should she feel sad? Ted wondered. For the message that had come over the 'phone had been good news and the tears that Bessie had shed had been happy and thankful tears.

Beneath it all was a suggestion of a shattered romance. That Frank was alive had been good news as far as it went. But was he alive for her?

To relieve the tension, Ted suggested that he would like to retire, and the farmer showed him to a large, pleasant, well-furnished room. It was evident the Wilburtons were people of considerable means.

Ted needed no rocking to put him to sleep that night, for the fearful strain of the day had

taken toll of him heavily, and he dropped off into slumber as soon as he touched the pillow.

When he woke the next morning the storm was still raging, and a glance from the window told him that he would be held captive for another day at least.

At breakfast, Bessie seemed to have mastered her agitation, and to all appearances, was as bright and jolly as she had been on her arrival home the previous afternoon. Ted's first favorable impression of her personality was deepened. Frank Bruin was indeed a lucky man, Ted thought, if Bessie Wilburton took an interest in him.

Soon after the meal was over, the farmer hitched up his team and he and Ted went up to the Bruin house.

There the reception that Ted got was warm beyond expression. Maxwell Bruin, a shaggy-haired, keen-eyed man of powerful build, shook Ted's hand with fervor.

"I can't thank you enough," he said, his voice broken with emotion, "for your courage and unselfishness. If it had not been for you, my son would not be alive at this moment."

"I'm amply paid for it, then," replied Ted. "And when you talk about pluck, don't forget that Dr. Yaley showed as much of it as I did. But tell me, how is your son getting along?"

"Fine," returned Mr. Bruin. "He's had a

good night's sleep, and it's only a matter of time now before he'll be as well as ever. But here's the doctor now. He'll tell you."

Dr. Yaley had just stepped out into the hall and now came forward to meet Ted, a smile on his face and his hand extended.

"How's my fellow-voyager?" he asked heartily.

"Fine as a fiddle," replied Ted, with a laugh. "If you're looking for another patient, you'll have to pick on some one else."

The doctor laughed.

"We'd be bankrupt if every one were like you," he replied. "You're a mighty good insurance risk."

"I was just wondering," said Ted, "if I might have a look at your patient and congratulate him."

"Surely you can," replied the doctor. "Though it won't do to stay long," he added. "As a matter of fact, he's been threatening me with violent death if I didn't let you in. He thinks you're something between a superman and a demi-god."

"He'll change his mind when he has a look at me," laughed Ted, as he followed the doctor into the sick-room.

In the subdued light, Ted made out the form of a young man in the bed. The aviator was glad to note that the face that turned eagerly

toward him had been unmarred by the accident.

It was a handsome face with courage and character in it, blended with a touch of recklessness. The eyes were frank and candid, the kind that look straight at one without wavering. Ted liked him on sight.

"So you're Ted Scott, the great Ted Scott!" he ejaculated. "I know you are, for I heard you talking in the hall. I've been longing to see you and thank you for the wonderful thing you did for me."

"Nothing more than you'd have done for me, had the position been reversed," disclaimed Ted, as he seated himself in the chair that a young woman, who was evidently taking the place of the wholly unattainable registered nurse, drew up to the bedside. "I'm delighted to hear that you're getting on so well."

"Better than I deserve," replied Frank Bruin. "I got what was coming to me for being such an idiot as to try to race an express train on a slippery road. The fools are not all dead yet. I can prove that, because I'm still alive."

His eyes twinkled.

"I guess I'm a born speed maniac," he went on. "It seems to be in my blood. Got to be first or nowhere."

"If you're looking for speed, you ought to be an airman," observed Ted smilingly.

"About the only thing I haven't tried," returned Frank. "But, do you know, ever since I read of that wonderful flight of yours across the Atlantic I've been crazy to be an aviator! Gee, it must be great! But the pater sat down on that hard. Told me it would be a quicker death to blow my brains out. Told him I hadn't any brains to blow out. He said maybe that was so."

He laughed again and Ted Scott laughed with him.

Frank pressed Ted with eager questions regarding his flight to Paris and his subsequent work in the flood, and Ted gave him some of the details until he realized that it was time to go.

"Don't go yet," begged Frank, as Ted pushed back his chair, preparatory to rising.

"I must," replied Ted, "or the doctor'll have my scalp. But I hope to see you again some time."

"You're staying at the Wilburtons I understand," observed Frank, in a tone that he tried to make careless.

"Yes," replied Ted. "We came down in their meadow. They've been mighty nice to me."

"They're fine people," murmured Frank.

"They were awfully cut up about your accident," went on Ted.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wilburton, you mean?" asked Frank.

"They, of course," replied Ted, glancing at Frank out of the corner of his eye. "But I was thinking especially of their daughter, Miss Bessie. She was crying her eyes out. And when she heard over the 'phone that you would live she went almost crazy with joy."

"Is that true?" asked Frank so excitedly that the nurse frowned.

"Of course it's true," replied Ted. "Shame, too, to spoil such lovely eyes. She's a wonderful girl. But I must be going now. Hurry now and get well."

Ted left him then and went along the hall, very well content with himself. How far he had helped to mend a broken romance he did not know, but at least he had done his best.

With repeated thanks from the elder Bruin, Ted returned with Mr. Wilburton to his home, where both mother and daughter were delighted to hear the good news from the invalid.

Ted cudgeled his brains to find some way to let Bessie know how excited Frank had been when he had learned of her emotions on his behalf, but found none, and, mindful of Mr. Wilburton's pronouncement about women as "curious creatures," decided that he had better let well enough alone.

Toward late afternoon the storm abated, but

too late for Ted to think about returning to his base that day. Jud had managed to get sufficient gasoline and the *Hapworth's* tank was fully replenished. What was bothering Ted was how he was to get a runway for his take-off.

But he need not have worried. The news had by this time spread all over town that Ted Scott was at the Wilburtons, and, despite the frightful condition of the roads, it was astonishing how great a number of people managed to get to the farmhouse.

The place was thronged all that afternoon and until late at night. And when it was known that Ted would need a manufactured runway, there was a host of eager volunteers, men and boys, only too proud to help their hero. It would be something to boast about to those less fortunate.

So, early the next morning the vanguard appeared, to be followed by a steadily swelling number provided with snowploughs and shovels. A level field near by was selected, and by noon a hard, firm pathway of nearly five hundred yards in length was ready for the take-off.

The *Hapworth* was rolled out of the barn and over on the improvised path. Ted gave it the most careful examination and saw that everything was in perfect working order. Then he shook hands with the Wilburtons, thanked

them warmly for their hospitality, and jumped into the cockpit.

The motor roared, the blocks were knocked away, and the *Hapworth* started down the runway. Twice Ted tried to lift it into the air, but found it difficult, because on the slippery pathway the wheels did not have the same push that they would have had on the turf. But on the third attempt the plane left the ground and soared skyward, its silver-like sheathing glittering brightly in the brilliant winter sunshine.

A roar went up from the crowd, which included practically the whole population of the little town. In recognition of the cheers and to give them a treat, Ted, before turning the nose of his plane homeward, went through a bewildering series of stunts such as they had never seen.

Barrel-rolls, falling leaves, Immelmanns, side-slips, tail spins, and nose dives followed each other in quick succession while the spectators gasped, breathless with excitement and delight. Then Ted circled the town twice and set his course for the flying field base.

In that amazing exhibition he had not only gratified the kindly folk who had treated him so well, but had also found a vent for his own high spirits. For he was jubilant and his heart sang within him. The stunts had been like the

frolicsome kicking of a colt turned out to pasture.

For life surely smiled at him. Barely past his majority, he had achieved a success that had made him the idol of his own people and famous throughout the world. The full tide of health and strength was flowing through his veins. He was fairly tingling with vitality. The future stretched out before him in a roseate vista. Life was sweet.

Just one shadow marred his perfect enjoyment. That was the thought, that often came over him, that he had no knowledge of his parents. He did not know who they were, where they had lived, whether even at this moment they were alive or dead.

Often he had lain awake at night, tormented by the mystery that shrouded his origin. Other lads of his age had family histories and ties. All his own ties were artificial. He could not remember a mother's kiss, a father's pat on the shoulder. In a vague way he felt defrauded.

To be sure, Eben and Charity Browning had taken the places of father and mother, and he loved them dearly. But they were not connected with him by blood. Could any one, however dear, take a parent's place?

But he shook off these intruding thoughts and devoted himself to the task at hand.

Straight as a homing pigeon, he went towards his mark. The motor was working beautifully and there was no blizzard this time to blind his eyes and confuse his calculations. The air was as clear as crystal, and long before he reached the flying field he could see the landmarks that gave him its location.

He swooped down upon it and made a perfect landing, to be immediately surrounded by his comrades, who had seen and recognized the glittering plane and now nearly wrung his hand off in their exuberance at seeing him again."

"Lay off, fellows," protested Ted laughingly. "I need that hand in my business."

"Risen from the dead, by heck!" cried Bill Twombley.

"Is it really Ted Scott or is it his double?" vociferated Roy Benedict.

"Let's see that rabbit-foot you carry about you," demanded Ed Allenby.

"You see, gentlemen, I have nothing up my sleeve to deceive you," laughed Ted. "But honest, boys, I'm mighty glad to see you again. More than once I thought I never would. But Bill, here, said I was as good as dead, and I wanted to prove him untruthful."

Bill made a pass at him that Ted ducked, and after rolling the *Hapworth* into her hangar they spent an animated hour discussing Ted's almost miraculous escape.

"What's this I hear about you going away for a little vacation?" asked Roy Benedict. "Ed was saying that you were speaking to him about it."

"Yes," admitted Ted, "I have applied for a leave of absence. You see, there are a lot of loose ends that I want to attend to at home, and I thought this would be as good a time as any. So I put in an application and it was granted. I think I'll start some day next week. I don't suppose it will be much of a vacation though, for I'll be as busy as a beaver all the time."

"Don't forget your old pals that are still in the harness," admonished Bill.

"You bet I won't," declared Ted. "And possibly I'll be back sooner than I think now. My fingers will be itching for the feeling of the old joystick."

"Once an aviator, always an aviator," grinned Bill Twombley. "It's worse than the drug habit."

The bitter cold abated by the time Ted was ready to make his visit to Bromville, so much so, indeed, that the snow began to melt and there was a touch that suggested spring in the air.

But there was a haze in the sky that seemed to forebode the coming of rain. And where there was rain there might be fog. So Ted

made sure that his instruments were in good condition, in case he should have to rely on them exclusively.

He bade a cordial good-by to his mates and started away shortly after noon. The haze still persisted, but it was not thick enough to offer any special difficulty in navigating. But as night drew on, it grew more dense, until by the time it was fully dark everything beneath him was blotted out. Even the lights of the towns over which he passed failed to reach him.

He was passing over a mountainous bit of country when the windows of heaven opened and the rain came down in torrents. With it came thunder and lightning, an unusual phenomenon for that season of the year.

Then, without the slightest warning, Ted felt a stream of ice-cold air strike him in the back of his neck.

An instant later the *Hapworth* was hurled forward as though by the stroke of a giant's fist!

## CHAPTER VI

### The Grip of the Tempest

Ted Scott was almost stunned with the suddenness of that terrific drive from behind.

But as another shock came in wake of the first, he gripped the controls and righted the plane, which was rearing up like an affrighted horse.

Masses of wet cloud came piling down upon the plane, enveloping it as in a shroud. The gale developed into something with the fury of a cyclone.

All Ted's craftsmanship was called into play to keep the machine on an even keel. At times it seemed to whirl completely around.

He turned the nose of the plane upward, seeking to get into a stratum of air that was quieter. But the clouds were so thick and so wet that they seemed to hold the plane back as though they were a solid substance. When at last he had forced his way through the heaviest of them, he found the upper air just as tempestuous as the lower.

Now came the lightning that shot in awful, jagged flashes across the sky and the roar of the thunder was like a series of rapid-fire explosions that burst with a force that it seemed would shatter Ted's eardrums.

He had been out in many storms, but none, it seemed to him, with the demoniac fury of this.

The lightning flashes were so blinding and so frequent that they dazzled his eyes so that he could scarcely read his instruments. Tongues of fire seemed to play about the plane. It was as though the elements, irritated at the audacity of this lone voyager in their realm, were determined to end him for once and all.

It was an eerie situation, and all of Ted's courage was called upon in order to maintain the cool judgment that was so sorely needed. A bit of hesitation, a wrong movement of the stick, and he would go whirling down with the plane completely out of control.

Then came a fearful crash, a dazzling light, and Ted thought that the plane had been struck. He himself must have been affected by the electric current, for there was a moment of daze from which he recovered to find himself flying upside down. He knew this by the strain upon his belt.

By a herculean effort he righted the plane and looked fearfully about its structure, ex-

pecting at any moment to see a red tongue of fire leap out from somewhere. But he could see no ominous red, nor could he smell smoke. This was proof that nothing combustible had been struck.

Then he thought of the motor. That would have been the most likely to attract the flash.

Yet it was working smoothly and seemed to have sustained no damage. He listened with his heart in his mouth for some knock or other irregularity. But none came, and after a few minutes he was reassured. But in that few minutes he seemed to have lived a lifetime.

Then, suddenly, the storm subsided as quickly as it had arisen. The rain dwindled into a drizzle and then ceased. There was still an occasional flash, but it was far off, and the rumble of the thunder was dying away over the distant hills.

Then the clouds were shredded, and through the rifts the moon and stars shone out. The storm was over.

Ted drew a long breath of thankfulness and wiped his brow, which was drenched with perspiration. He had been under a fearful strain, and there had been moments when his life had not seemed worth the proverbial copper.

Truly, an aviator's plane was no place for a weakling! There, if anywhere, none but the fittest survived.

All through the night he drove, and by noon on the following day found himself circling over the flying field at Bromville. Never had the old home town looked so good to him.

It was good, too, to see the old crowd that poured out from the Aero Plant to greet him, good old Mark Lawson and Breck Lewis and Jack Forrest and big Bill Ellison, the foreman, with a host of others. Their welcome was boisterous and hilarious, and they mauled and pounded Ted to their hearts' content.

"About time you got back here," cried Bill, his rubicund countenance glowing like a full moon. "Where in thunder have you been keeping yourself?"

"Doesn't seem like the same old place while you're away from it!" exclaimed Mark.

"You put Bromville on the map and then you deserted it," laughed Breck. "Explain yourself."

"Bet he's been up at Washington telling the Government how to run the air service," chaffed Jack.

"Nothing like that," grinned Ted, warmed to the heart by the cordial welcome. "I've just been learning to fly over the Rockies. And it's some stunt to do that right, believe me."

"You learning," mocked Mark Lawson. "As if there was anything about aviation that you didn't know!"

"Lots," replied Ted. "I'm just a baby at it compared with what there is to learn."

"A pretty husky infant, I'll tell the world," grinned Breck Lewis.

"I'd like to adopt him until he learns his way around," chuckled Jack.

It was hard for Ted to tear himself away from them, but he managed it at last and hurried home. That is, he tried to hurry, but was stopped at every step by some one who wanted to shake hands with him.

Get to the old Bromville House he did at last, however, and there the sweetest welcome of all awaited him. Eben was choked for words and Charity simply folded Ted in her arms and wept over him. Happy tears that healed her heart of loneliness and longing!

The old couple held on to him so tenaciously that it was not till the next day that he was able to make his promised call upon Mr. Hapworth, his closest friend and business adviser, with whom he had been in frequent correspondence. Mr. Hapworth, although his legal residence was in St. Louis, spent much time in Bromville where he had business interests.

"How are you, Ted?" Mr. Hapworth greeted him, clasping his hand warmly. "But it isn't necessary to ask that question. You're as bronzed as an Indian and as lithe as a greyhound. My, but you're fit!"

"If I felt any better, I'd be afraid of myself," grinned Ted. "I sure am glad to see you again, Mr. Hapworth. You certainly look fine yourself."

"My golf keeps me in good condition," returned his friend. "But now sit down and tell me all about yourself. That is, all that I don't know already from the newspapers. They keep a pretty close tab on you and your doings. Such, for instance, as risking your life recently in order to carry that surgeon over the mountains."

Ted threw up his hands in despair.

"Did they get hold of that, too?" he asked.

"You bet they did and played it up big!" replied Mr. Hapworth. "You're mighty juicy copy for the newspaper boys, Ted, and you can't expect them to let up on you. Why, you get as much space as the President of the United States. Well, that's the penalty of fame, and you can't dodge it. But now to more personal matters. How's the book getting along?"

He referred to a book that Ted had written of his Atlantic flight and which had been published while he was down South working for the flood sufferers.

"Fine," replied Ted. "They've had to publish several editions, and my publishers tell me they can't keep up with the demand."

"That sounds good," commented Mr. Hapworth.

"It does," agreed Ted. "What looks good, too, are the nice fat royalty checks I get for it. Funny, isn't it," he added reminiscently, "that when my foster father and mother were so badly in need I just had my few dollars of wages to give them, and now when I could give them plenty they don't need it. They're on Easy Street since they've made Gale pay up for the property he cheated them out of. By the way, what about our dear friends, the Gales?"

"As full of poison as ever," smiled Mr. Hapworth. "Gale still swaggers and blusters about, but it's all a bluff. That lawsuit, or what would have been a lawsuit if he hadn't crawfished, put an awful crimp in his pride and his pocketbook. I suppose he's still a fairly rich man, but not half as rich as when he was sitting tight with the loot. And, oh boy, how he hates you for bringing him to book! I think he'd boil you alive in oil if he could."

Ted laughed.

"No doubt," he said, "and I suppose those precious sons of his, Greg and Duck, feel the same way."

"They're the scandal of the town," declared Mr. Hapworth. "Drunk half the time and mixed up in all sorts of disgraceful escapades.

They're bad medicine, both of them. They'll keep on trying the townspeople's patience until some night they'll be driven out of Bromville and told never to come back."

"I guess they're heading for something of that kind," observed Ted. "It's been coming to them for a long time."

"Now about your present work," went on Mr. Hapworth. "I was away, you know, at the time you went out to the region of the Rockies, and I didn't quite get your idea. Just what is it?"

"Something like this," explained Ted. "I felt I needed that experience to perfect my education as an airman. In the main, you know, my previous work in the air service was over level country. That route from Chicago to St. Louis, for instance, was over what had at one time been simply prairie land. Conditions stayed largely the same, and after you got used to it, the work was velvet.

"But mountain flying is a different matter. The air currents are capricious. The gorges are like funnels, and the air rushes through them like water through a mill race. Before you know it, you hit a gust or a pocket that's likely to turn you topsy-turvy, if you're not on the watch. Then there are the mountain peaks that test a man's skill in clearing them or going around them. A man who's conquered moun-

tain flying can claim to be a past master of the art. There's all the difference between mountain flying and flat flying that there is between college and kindergarten."

"And you wouldn't be satisfied until you were a college graduate," added Mr. Hapworth smilingly.

"Something of that kind," admitted Ted. "In other words, I wanted to learn all there is to know about flying under every possible condition, and I didn't know of any way to get that knowledge except by actual experience."

"I guess you're right," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "When you've had that experience, what then?"

"Then I'll be qualified to teach others," replied Ted promptly. "You know we've talked about my opening an aviation school. I still think strongly of doing that. Or, if I go into the manufacture of airplanes, the experience I'm getting in the Rockies will help me there. I've already learned a lot about just the kind of planes that are best fitted to stand the strain of mountain work, and I'd be able to put those ideas into practice."

"I see your point," said Mr. Hapworth. "I think it's a capital one, especially as the air mail service seems to be on the verge of an enormous development. By the way, I saw in the papers that the Government was going out

of the air mail service and would lease the different routes to private corporations."

"That's correct," replied Ted. "It's a good thing, too. There's too much red tape about Government ownership, and it makes for inefficiency. You see what a job it made of it when it tried to run the railroads. Perhaps it had to be done then, because it was war time; but there's no reason for it now. Private enterprise can give much better and quicker service."

"Perhaps you'll buy one of the routes for yourself one of these days," ventured Mr. Hapworth.

"I won't deny that the idea has occurred to me," said Ted. "If I ever do get to be the head of a concern like that, I don't want to have any employee that can teach me anything about flying."

"It's a cinch that you won't have," smiled Mr. Hapworth. "You're on the right track, Ted. The man who knows every phase of his business from the ground up is the man that wins."

For the next day or two Ted was busy attending to his correspondence, and kept pretty closely to the house. But, busy as he was, he snatched enough time each day to take the *Hapworth* for a spin in the skies. It was his way of keeping in form. Had he been an athlete

training for a contest, he could not have taken better care of his physical condition.

On the second afternoon, on his return from an air excursion, he was about a dozen miles from Bromville when he noticed that his motor was missing.

He looked about for a landing field and saw a level expanse of meadow that promised well for that purpose. He brought his plane down, and came to a stop not far from a high hedge that intervened between him and the road.

As he came down, he noticed a young girl walking along the road, but paid no special attention to her.

He was standing by the machine, tinkering with the motor, when an auto passed by. There was a grinding of brakes as it came to a stop a little farther on.

Then Ted heard the frightened cry of a girl!

## CHAPTER VII

### Flying Fists

At that cry from the girl Ted Scott dropped his wrench. He glanced hastily around, and, seeing a place not far away where the hedge seemed less thick, he forced his way through.

About a hundred yards down the road, usually a deserted one at that season, the girl he had noted from the plane was struggling with two men, who were trying to pull her toward the automobile.

Ted sped down the road like a flash. Their backs were toward him, and they did not see him coming.

"Aw, come on and be a sport," one of the men was saying.

"Too pretty a girl to be walking when she can have a nice auto ride," chuckled the other man.

"I won't! I won't!" screamed the girl. "Leave me alone, you loafers!"

The next instant Ted was upon them. He crashed into one of the men, the force of the

impact driving the rascal a dozen feet away.

Ted snatched the girl from the grasp of the other and put her behind him.

He was facing Greg Gale, whose face was aflame with fury. It was Duck Gale who now had regained his equilibrium and came hurrying back toward Ted.

"What do you mean by doing that?" shouted Duck savagely.

"I'll see that you get what's coming to you for this, Ted Scott!" roared Greg.

"All right, come and see to it," replied Ted coolly, throwing himself into an attitude of defence.

"Who gave you any license to butt into our affairs?" cried Duck.

Ted looked at him contemptuously and turned to the girl, who was crying.

"Do you know these men?" he asked.

"No," she sobbed. "I never saw them in my life before. They stopped the car and asked me to take a ride with them. I said I wouldn't, and then they jumped out and tried to drag me to the car."

"Aw, we weren't going to hurt her," snarled Greg.

"Can't a man ask a girl to take a ride, without you interfering?" demanded Duck truculently.

"You can't make her go when she refuses,"

replied Ted. "Not while I'm around. Where do you live?" he asked the girl.

"In that house over there," replied the girl, pointing to a building a little way up the road.

"All right, you run along there," directed Ted. "I'll see that they don't follow you."

"Oh, I'm so glad you were near! I can never thank you enough," exclaimed the girl, as she hastened away.

"Too bad she went before she saw the drubbing you're going to get," growled Greg.

"Really?" drawled Ted, never budging.

"We're going to change that face of yours so that your best friends won't know you," threatened Duck, moving a little closer to Ted.

"Plucky pair, now that you're together," replied Ted satirically. "But I don't think that either one of you or both together can change my face, as you put it. And before you try to do it, let me tell you something. You're both bullies and you're both cowards. You're the kind that insult a girl. You're the kind that hurl stones in the dark or hire other men to hurl them. You're the kind that cut the struts of an airplane—also in the dark. You're the meanest, most contemptible skunks that I ever met. Now come on and change my face."

Blazing with fury and confident that the odds were with them, Greg and Duck made a concerted rush for Ted.

But the latter was ready, and met Greg with a blow on the chin that rocked him from head to heels. He caught Duck too with a heavy clip in the mouth. They staggered for a moment, but again bored in, and for a few minutes there was a storm of flying fists and the thuds of their impact as they met panting bodies.

Each of the twins was as big as Ted, and they were several years older. But they were flabby from soft and dissipated living and wind and muscle failed when the test came.

Apart from physical disqualifications, Greg and Duck had a yellow streak. They could not "stand the gaff." Yellow was one color with which Ted had no acquaintance.

Soon, shaken and bewildered, the twins began to give ground.

Ted's fist shot out and caught Greg a terrific clip between the eyes. The fellow went down like a log, and for a minute or two was "out."

Then Ted gave his undivided attention to Duck, and rained upon him such a hail of blows that he soon had him lying on the ground, sobbing with pain and rage.

"Got enough?" asked Ted, as he stood waiting for him to get up.

"E-enough," stammered Duck, fairly writhing in his humiliation.

"Good!" observed Ted. "I guess Greg has,

too, though for the moment he doesn't seem able to say anything."

But at that instant Greg opened his eyes. Those useful organs, however, were so bleared that he could not see clearly.

"Did you finish him, Duck?" Greg asked thickly.

"No," laughed Ted, as Duck kept silent. "He's waiting for you to do that job. Feel like trying it on a little more?"

Greg saw then his brother in a sitting position on the ground and sensed the situation.

A torrent of imprecations rushed from him, and, smiling amusedly, Ted let him rave.

"Don't talk so much," urged Ted at last. "Get up and do something. I'm still here. Always ready to oblige. No trouble to show goods."

"It's your turn now," muttered Greg sullenly. "But every dog has his day. We'll have ours yet."

"Yes, even yellow dogs, I suppose," returned Ted. "Now is there anything else you gentlemen would like to say to me? If so, say it quickly, for this is my busy day."

"You'll hear from us some other time," growled Greg.

"And when you do, you'll wish you'd never been born," threatened Duck.

"I notice that you're making those remarks

while you're still in a sitting position," remarked Ted. "That shows commendable discretion, because naturally I can't hit you while you're down. Perhaps you'll stand up and repeat them."

He waited, but the Gale twins made no move.

"Don't care to, eh?" remarked Ted disappointedly. "Well, have it your own way. I'll have to be going now. Thank you for a pleasant afternoon. And the next time you try to make a girl take a ride with you, make sure there's nobody about. Luckily, I had to come down to fix my plane. I'll go now and see if any one has cut a strut through in my absence."

"Time you stowed that guff about the strut," growled Greg. "We didn't have anything to do with that."

"Didn't eh?" retorted Ted. "Is it possible I've been doing you gentlemen an injustice? Didn't do it yourselves or hire some one else to do it? Weren't watching with all your eyes that day of the flying circus to see the plane crumple and me come down? Didn't growl about hard luck when I came through safely? And here all this time I've been thinking you were implicated in it!

"And that little matter of the stone," went on Ted, referring to another incident mentioned in the second book of this series, "that went whizzing by my head on that dark night.

Don't know anything about that either, do you? Well, well, it just shows how easy it is to be mistaken. Here I've been thinking you were sneaking coyotes, when all this time you've just been bleating lambs."

The Gale twins said nothing, but their eyes were full of hate.

Ted turned and walked with composure down the road.

The moment his back was turned, Greg and Duck leaped to their feet and ran to their car.

They jumped in and Greg threw in the clutch. The car started and Greg stepped on the accelerator.

Ted had gone for perhaps fifty yards when something caused him to turn around.

The car was bearing down on him with railroad speed!

Ted stepped to the side of the road.

The car swerved also in his direction.

Ted jumped to the other side.

Again the car swerved correspondingly.

There was no longer any doubt! They were trying to run him down!

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Pursuing Car

A cold sweat broke out on Ted Scott as he realized that the baffled miscreants, mad with fury, were trying to run him down.

He glanced like lightning to either side of the road.

On one side was the hedge, too high for him to jump, and if he attempted to break through, the car would strike him before he had accomplished his purpose.

On the other side was a steep cliff, impossible to scale.

The only hope of safety lay in a big tree, a little further up the road. If he could only get behind that, the purpose of his pursuers would be balked.

He set out toward it with the speed of a deer.

On a straight course the car would have been sure to catch him. But Ted, instead of running straight ahead and thus offering a sure target, doubled and dodged and twisted like a fox trying to elude the hounds.

The car followed his every movement, turning to right and left, as the chase demanded. But every time it turned it lost speed, as the driver otherwise would have had to dash into the hedge or the cliff. It was that lost motion that proved Ted's salvation.

The car was right upon him when Ted, with one desperate leap, gained the shelter of the tree. He clasped it with his arm, swinging his body around just as the car dashed past, its mudguard scraping the bark.

The intention of the young rascals had failed, but by what a terribly slender margin!

As the car rushed on, Ted caught sight of Duck shaking his fist and shouting something that he could not distinctly hear. But he readily understood its purport.

Ted watched the car until it was out of sight. Then he retraced his steps to the field where he had left his plane.

The infernal cunning of the scheme came to him as he thought it over. There were no witnesses. Men were being run down by automobiles every day. Nothing could have been simpler than for the twins to say that they were driving along the road when Ted had suddenly come from behind the hedge and, not noticing the car, had stepped squarely in its path before they had time to swerve aside. It would be just one more of the regrettable acci-

dents, due to the carelessness of the victims, that were happening all the time. And Ted Scott would be a cripple, if, indeed, he were alive at all!

Ted ground his teeth and clenched his fists. It was lucky for the villains that they were not within Ted Scott's reach, and that they would stay well beyond his reach during his stay in Bromville he felt assured.

He himself could do nothing. His statement would be met with a prompt denial. No court would hold them for a moment on a flat, unsupported statement. Ted would simply make himself a laughing stock.

Besides, Ted preferred to settle his own quarrels. And he promised himself that he would settle this if ever opportunity offered.

The repairs on his plane were soon completed, and Ted took the *Hapworth* into the air and set sail for home.

He said nothing to Eben and Charity Browning of his afternoon's experience. The health of the latter was frail and he knew that a full disclosure of what had happened would throw her into a panic of terror. She had enough worry as it was over the possibilities of disaster that were attached to the airman's calling.

But he sought out Mr. Hapworth as soon as he could, and to him he narrated the attempt

upon his life—for so Ted believed it to be.

The latter was distressed and shocked beyond measure.

"Why, it's abominable, monstrous!" he cried. "Those curs will stop at nothing! They ought to be put behind the bars."

"That's where they belong, of course," agreed Ted. "But we've got no case that would stand in a court of law. But I thought you ought to know of this, so that if anything serious happens to me you'll know where to look for the criminals."

"That's three times you've been in mortal danger," observed his friend. "Each time, in all probability, from the same source. It's maddening to have a moral certainty and not be able to convert it into a legal certainty."

"It sure is," assented Ted. "But some time they'll be caught with the goods, and then it will be my turn. Give them rope enough and they'll hang themselves."

Then Ted turned the conversation to the business, to discuss which had really brought the young aviator back to Bromville at the present time.

A few days later Mr. Hapworth departed for Cuba where he expected to remain for the rest of the winter. The parting between him and Ted was most cordial, and each promised to write frequently to the other.

Ted was restless after his friend's departure, and felt the old longing to be once again in the air. But his leave of absence had not yet expired, and he had not the heart to tear himself away from the old people until the very last moment.

He beguiled his restlessness by giving the *Hapworth* a complete overhauling. If he could not be in the air, the next best thing was to be with his plane.

In this work he was so thorough, excessively thorough, it might seem, that Mark Lawson, who had strolled up to where he was working near the hangar on the field of the Aero Corporation, was moved to comment.

"I declare, Ted," he said, "you're as careful with that machine as a mother is over her baby."

"Got to be," laughed Ted. "Perhaps even more so. For if a mother's a little careless, the baby isn't going to kill her. But if I overlook anything on my plane, it's quite likely to kill me."

So he went over it as with a fine-toothed comb. He examined the landing gear, wheels, fittings and shock absorbers; the open control wires and pulleys and the hinges on the control surfaces; the struts, wires, cables and turnbuckles; the engine exhaust manifolds and exhaust pipe extensions; the carburetors and

fuel-feed lines; the cooling system and connections; the engine installations; the alignment of the propellers; the control surface fabric; the fuselage and tail skid; saw that the cowlings were properly secured and safetied.

It was a work of time as well as a labor of love, but when he had finished he knew that the *Hapworth* was as staunch and dependable as it had been the day it came from the shops, just before he had launched himself on his immortal flight.

"Isn't she a beauty?" he asked Mark enthusiastically, as he patted caressingly the splendid plane.

"Yes," replied Mark a little absent-mindedly.

Ted glanced quickly at his friend.

"What's the matter, Mark?" he inquired. "You look down in the mouth about something."

Mark came out of his reverie.

"Do I?" he replied. "Well, to tell the honest truth, Ted, I feel just as I look."

"Not sick or anything?" asked Ted anxiously, for he had a warm affection for Mark Lawson. "No trouble at home?"

Mark shook his head.

"No, it isn't that," he answered. "But I'm afraid I've lost about all of what little money I have. Or rather that I had."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that!" exclaimed Ted

earnestly. "Tell me about it. That is, if it isn't private."

"Not at all," replied Mark, who seemed relieved to be able to unburden himself to his friend. "I came into a small legacy a little while ago when my aunt died. Not so much to some folks, but a good deal to me—about three thousand dollars."

"Not to be sneezed at," interjected Ted.

"So I thought," replied Mark. "I'd only been able to save a few hundred dollars from my wages, and that three thousand looked like a mountain. I imagined all sorts of things that I'd be able to buy with it, things I had wanted all my life and had never been able to get. I suppose I spent it a dozen times over in my mind."

"That's sometimes the best way to spend it," observed Ted. "You have lots of fun and you still have the money left."

"Then I got to thinking," went on Mark, "that I'd put off spending any of it until I'd given that money a chance to grow. Money makes money, you know."

"Right you are," assented Ted. "In a savings bank at four per cent, it'll double in seventeen years."

"I wish I'd been sensible enough to leave it in the savings bank," sighed Mark. "But I figured out that it would be foolish to take four

per cent when in some good investment I might be able to make six per cent."

"Something in that, too," admitted Ted, who had now stopped working and was listening with the keenest interest, "as long as you steer clear of wildcat stocks."

"And crooked brokers," added Mark.

"So you put it in the hands of brokers to invest for you?" asked Ted.

"Yes," replied Mark. "I thought I was picking out good, reliable ones. They'd been in business a long time and had a solid reputation. But I see by this morning's paper that the firm has gone into the hands of a receiver."

"Broke?" cried Ted.

"Busted!" confirmed Mark sadly. "See," he added, as he took a newspaper from his pocket and pointed to a heading, "Clegg & Company Go Under."

"Clegg and Company!" cried Ted, snatching at the paper. "They've got a lot of my money, too!"

## CHAPTER IX

### Startling News

"What?" cried Mark Lawson, starting back and looking at Ted incredulously. "Are you stuck, too?"

"Just as badly as you are, and worse, too," replied Ted. "They've got twenty thousand dollars of my money!"

He gripped the paper and ran his eyes hastily over the story. There it was, sure enough, in black and white. The firm of Clegg & Company had been obliged to close its doors and was now in the hands of a receiver!

That was not the worst of it. It was not only a failure, but a bad failure. It was intimated in the paper that, from a hasty review of the situation, the assets of the concern had been almost entirely dissipated. There were heavy liabilities, and it was estimated that the creditors were likely to receive only a few cents on the dollar, if indeed they received anything.

There were sinister rumors afloat that the failure had not been due simply to misfortune

or bad judgment. Grave irregularities had already been uncovered that, it was hinted, might land some of the partners in jail.

Ted and Mark looked blankly at each other.

"Well, we're brothers in misfortune," remarked Ted sadly, as he folded up the paper and handed it back to his friend. "Looks as though we were left holding the bag. I can't understand it. I looked them up through the commercial agencies before I entrusted my money to them, and the reports were of the best."

"I'm dreadfully sorry that you got stung too," said Mark.

"I guess that as a financier I'm a pretty good aviator," remarked Ted, with a rueful smile. "Well, there's no use crying over spilt milk."

"Perhaps it isn't all spilt," replied Mark. "There may be some left in the pitcher."

"Only a few drops, I'm afraid," prophesied Ted. "According to this account, by the time the expenses of the receivership are met and the whole mess is cleared up, we may have a few cents on the dollar. The rest of the money we'll have to charge up to experience."

He was deeply depressed as, after a little more mutual condoling with Mark Lawson, he made his way homeward.

Twenty thousand dollars was a lot to lose!

Yet, as he thought it over, he had little to

reproach himself with, as far as his choice of a firm had been concerned. He had not selected it blindly. He had made careful inquiries as to its standing, and it had been reported irreproachable.

In one thing, however, he had been derelict. He had given them too free a hand. Instead of requiring that they should send to him the stocks they bought for his account, he had left them with the firm for safe keeping, confident that he could get them whenever he asked for them.

And now, perhaps, as the newspaper hinted, the firm, in desperate efforts to stave off failure, had rehypothecated his stocks to raise money and all had gone down in the smash.

It was a bitter pill for Ted Scott to swallow. He felt chagrined, not only at the probable loss of the money, but at his failure to get the stocks in his own possession.

But, after all, he felt sorrier for Mark Lawson than he did for himself, for it represented for Mark the loss of practically all that he had. Good old Mark to whom money came so slowly! And he had built so much on that legacy!

As for himself, the loss was not fatal. It was only a part, though a substantial part, of the large amount he had made following his great Atlantic flight. For, apart from the twenty-five thousand dollar prize, money and gifts had

poured in upon him and the returns from his book were large and increasing.

Still it was a heavy blow, as it would have been to any one but a millionaire, and it had ruined Ted's day for him.

He wished ardently that Mr. Hapworth were in Bromville so that he could talk it over with him. Or Mr. Monet, his other staunch and experienced friend. But the former was in Cuba and the latter in France, and Ted felt himself adrift in troubled financial waters.

There was little that he could do for the present, except to await developments. He knew that a receivership proceeding was a slow and painful thing, and that months might elapse before a settlement was reached.

One thing he did do at once, however, as soon as he reached home, and that was to write a detailed statement of the facts to Mr. Barstow of Eldridge, Barstow & Harkins, his Chicago lawyers, and direct him to look after his interests in the matter.

For the next few days he studied the papers carefully and read every word pertaining to the failure. But what he read brought him little comfort. The failure seemed to grow worse as the accountants probed more deeply into the tangled affairs of the firm.

One of the partners had disappeared, and the others, though not yet arrested, were under

surveillance. Altogether the outlook was decidedly dark.

"Guess I can kiss that money good-by," Ted muttered to himself. "And Mark! Good old Mark!"

A thought came to him. He mulled it over in his mind, and as he did so, a slow smile spread over his face.

Mark should not lose! Even if he, Ted Scott, never got a cent of his money back, *Mark should not lose!*

How he would manage it he did not know. But there would be some way. An anonymous letter, typewritten, posted perhaps from Chicago. Mr. Barstow would attend to that for him. And Mark would never know the source of the gift.

Ted felt better now.

Two days before his leave of absence expired, Ted received a letter from Bill Twombley. Bill was not an accomplished letter writer, and had a regrettable tendency toward slanginess, but his letter was breezy and Ted read it with amusement that deepened into interest before he had finished.

"How are you, old sock?" Bill said in part. "Done any more flirting with death since you carried that medical bozo across the range? Bet you've been up in the air every day, even

if it was vacation. Can't keep a squirrel on the ground.

"Boys asking about you all the time and wanting you to get back. They'll be almost glad enough to kiss you, like those French big bugs did when you were in Paris.

"Been big changes since you was here. Suppose you've read something about it in the papers. We're not working for Uncle Sam any more. Private corporation got the route. Don't know yet whether there'll be any more kale in it for us fliers than there was before, but here's hoping.

"One of the efficiency fellows has been along squinting at us and figuring, I suppose, how many of us can be let out. That's what they do, you know, cutting down the force (and piling the work on the others) so as to reduce expenses. Some of us will get the axe.

"There's one fellow here that's been taking your place while you were on leave. His name's Sam Felwig. He's a mean customer, the kind you know that would take pennies off a dead man's eyes. He's a good enough flier, all right, but that let's him out. The gang love him like they do poison ivy. Ed's already had a run in with him and blackened one of his eyes and Roy's so sore at him that he's itching for a chance to blacken the other. This Sam's the kind of fellow that rubs everybody the wrong

way. Can't get along well with folks, nohow.

"Well, that's neither here nor there. What I'm trying to get at is that he's figuring to hold on to your job. Boasting that he's got influence that will help him do it. Started sneering at you the other day, and got a clip in the nose that shut him up pronto. My knuckles are sore yet.

"I'm just giving you a tip, old sock, so that you'll know how the land lays. Well, so long.

"Bill."

Ted was thoughtful as he folded up the letter. This was a development on which he had not counted.

He knew, of course, that marked changes were bound to come with the transfer of ownership from the Government to private corporations. But he had taken it for granted that his place would be secure. Or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that he had not thought of it at all.

Even if he should find himself out, as far as this special route was concerned, it would make no difference to him financially. The instant he was known to be at liberty he would be deluged with offers at much larger figures.

But, for the reasons he had stated to Mr. Hapworth, his heart was set on gaining the experience that would be afforded by this special

Rocky Mountain route. No other had for him the same attraction.

He had a warm friendship, too, with the other fliers on the route, all of whom had been good fellows whom he liked thoroughly. He was sorry that this Sam Felwig should have been introduced as a disturbing element in that hitherto congenial group. It irked him, too, to think that by underhand means this newcomer was trying to work himself into Ted's berth.

It was in the nature of a challenge, and Ted Scott accepted it promptly.

He hurriedly wound up his affairs in Bromville.

It was with great reluctance that Ted said good-by to Eben and Charity, especially as the latter was ailing. But he cheered her up as well as he could by promising to write to her twice a week, instead of once as had been his previous custom.

Mark, with a great many others of his friends, had gathered to see him off.

"Keep up your spirits, Mark," Ted counseled him cheerily. "I have a hunch that somehow you aren't going to lose a cent."

"Wish I could think so," replied Mark, with a faint shadow of a smile. "Nothing in the news so far to give me that idea."

"Good-by, old scout," said Bill Ellison, as

he shook hands with Ted. "Be good. Don't take any rubber dimes."

"I won't," promised Ted, but he smiled a little bitterly to himself. If his twenty thousand dollars was gone, he had already taken about two hundred thousand "rubber dimes!"

There was a chorus of hearty farewells as Ted zipped down the runway and lifted the *Hapworth* into the air.

As he mounted into the skies, all his worries and forebodings dropped from him like a discarded garment. He was in his chosen element. The serene, clear upper air was like a purifying bath that enabled him to shed all the dross and dust of earth and emerge as a free soul.

He was favored with beautiful weather, and the *Hapworth* was sailing like a dream. The hum of its motor was music to his ears.

He had figured on a non-stop flight and hoped to get to his destination by the time his leave expired.

He left the more thickly settled parts of the country and was soon in a more wooded and hilly region. Here he had to exercise greater care, as, in case of engine trouble, landing would be far more difficult than it had been in the earlier stages of his long journey.

He was flying over one of the great national forests where the trees extended in all direc-

tions farther than the eye could reach when, glancing below him, he saw what seemed to be flickering tongues of fire.

Before he could confirm his first impression, he had passed far beyond the spot, for the *Hapworth* was flying at the rate of about a hundred miles an hour.

Ted thought quickly. Should he go back? He hated to, for it would mean that much lost time, and perhaps, after all, he had only imagined the flames. Might it not have been simply some peculiar effect of the sun shining through the trees?

But his hesitation vanished in an instant. He had seen forest fires before and knew the terrible tragedy often involved in them. He thought of the little settlements slumbering peacefully among the trees, the unsuspecting men, women, and children.

He must go back!

He turned the *Hapworth* in a great sweeping curve and started for the spot where he had seen that sinister red light.

## CHAPTER X

### The Red Demon

In a few minutes Ted Scott was hovering somewhere above the place that had attracted his attention, but it was some time before his frantic search was successful.

Then he caught sight once more of that ominous redness. It was more brilliant now.

He descended as low as he dared toward the tops of the trees. Then he saw in a little clearing a cabin in flames.

Some hunter's or trapper's cabin, he suspected, that had been occupied perhaps by a party of tourists. A cigarette, perhaps, carelessly tossed aside, a campfire, not sufficiently trodden out, had been sufficient to start what might prove a conflagration involving the loss of an enormous amount of property and, what was worse, a number of human lives.

The cabin was fully ablaze now, and Ted could see little tongues of fire creeping along the turf toward the great trees that stood not far from the doomed hut.

In a case like that, everything depended on time. Every second was precious.

Had there been any place to land, Ted would have come down and tackled the fire single-handed, for it seemed to him that he would be able to beat out the flames before they had fairly attacked the trees. But he saw no possible landing place, and his heart sank.

Then he recalled having passed over a settlement a little while before he had glimpsed the fire. Instantly he made for this place.

He knew that all there would turn out on the instant to battle with the flames. And, as was the custom in the national park region, there would be radio there that would immediately notify the forest rangers, and those gallant fire-fighters would rush promptly to the place.

As the *Hapworth* flew toward the settlement Ted hastily scribbled a note, telling of the fire and giving, as well as he could, the location of the cabin. This he fastened to a small implement.

He reached the settlement and, as he had felt sure it would, the roar of the plane brought practically all the people out of doors to gaze at the sky wanderer.

He flew low and made frantic gesticulations to focus their attention. Then he dropped the implement to which the note was fastened.

The little crowd scattered as it came down,

and then Ted saw one of the men pick it up and read the note.

Instantly there was wild excitement. The men rushed into the houses and came out armed with shovels. The women followed, equipped with brooms, for in an emergency like this men and women worked together to save their threatened homes and lives.

Ted knew now that his work was done. With a heart full of thankfulness, he turned and resumed his course.

Again he came to the blazing cabin, and now he saw that some of the trees had caught and were burning fiercely.

His heart was wrung with apprehension, for the people of the settlement had been pitifully few. They needed every possible help. He longed to take his part.

He rose higher into the skies so that he could have an unobsructed view of the surrounding country, and his heart leaped as, at a little distance, he discerned a bare and flat plateau that seemed to offer a chance for a landing.

A minute more and he was directly above it. The plateau proved long enough and broad enough for a landing, but there were rocks scattered about it in places that it would require the greatest care and skill to avoid.

But Ted Scott had taken many worse chances, and did not hesitate for a moment.

He came down at the most promising place and brought the *Hapworth* quickly and safely to a stop.

Almost before it had ceased quivering he was out of the plane and off on a run to the threatened spot of woodland. He had no difficulty in finding it, for now the flames themselves served as a guide.

He reached the clearing, panting and breathless, to find that as yet he was alone. The people who had been warned had not yet had time to reach it.

He had no shovel or other implement, but he seized a thick branch, that served him as a flail, and with this he clubbed at the burning turf and some of the trees up whose bark the flames were creeping.

He worked like a demon. The sweat was pouring down from him in streams. But he never let up for a moment, and quelled a number of flames in their incipiency.

In a few minutes others burst into the clearing and worked side by side with him.

With their shovels they dug ditches, while with axes others cut down the trees toward which the flames were leaping in search of further fuel.

It was back-breaking, heart-breaking work, but it held the red terror in check until a droning in the sky signaled the coming of the

forest rangers in an airplane equipped with chemical fire extinguishers.

The rangers landed on the same plateau on which Ted had left the *Hapworth* and came running with the extinguishers. With these they set to work, and in a little while the flames were brought under control.

Ted's face was blackened, his eyebrows singed, and there were blisters on his hands and neck. But he was happy, for he had done a man's job, and he was perfectly willing to pay the price in pain and discomfort.

The men and women of the settlement crowded about him with words of gratitude and the forest rangers were enthusiastic in their praise.

"Just that few minutes you got here ahead of the rest did the business!" exclaimed one man. "You stopped the fire getting a start in a dozen other places. We had hard enough work to stop it as it was."

"Glad I happened to get here just when I did," returned Ted. "And now I guess I'll get back to my plane. I've got a good long way to go before night."

"I noticed the name on that plane of yours when our own came down near it," put in another ranger. "It was the *Hapworth.* I suppose you named it after the one that crossed the Atlantic."

"Not exactly," replied Ted. "But I must be going now."

"Say," broke in another of the rangers, who had been observing Ted closely, "you ain't—it can't be that you're Ted Scott himself?"

"Guilty," grinned Ted. "But for the love of Pete, Buddy, keep it under your hat. I've got to get going."

But the other had already raised his voice.

"Hey, folks!" he shouted to the settlers who had already started on their way homeward. "Here's Ted Scott, the fellow that made that Atlantic flight."

They came back then on the run, all weariness forgotten in the eagerness to study the face of the man who had set the whole world ringing with his fame.

Ted had to submit good-naturedly to the ovation they gave him, but, as soon as he decently could, he got under way toward his plane. But they would not be shaken off, and streamed along after him in a hubbub of excited exclamations until he reached the plateau.

There he bathed his hands and face in a little spring that was bubbling near by, got into his plane, and, with a wave of farewell, zoomed into the skies, the crowd shouting and watching him with all their eyes until he had disappeared from sight.

He glanced at the clock that hung before

him in the cockpit. He had lost a couple of precious hours, and the *Hapworth* would have to show its best paces to get him to his destination before dark.

Just as dusk was drawing on, he caught sight of the familiar air field. It was still light enough to permit the silverlike sheathing of his plane to be discerned from the ground, and he could see the boys tumbling out from their shacks and hangars at the news that Ted Scott was coming.

He circled about the field once, made a loop the loop as a sign to his friends how glad he was to be back, and then came down in a graceful spiral to a perfect landing.

As the plane came to a stop he was surrounded by his comrades, who fairly pulled him from the cockpit and pounded him until he laughingly begged for mercy.

Bill Twombley grasped him by the shoulders and stood him off to get a good look at him.

"By the great horn spoon!" he gasped, as he saw Ted's blistered face. "What have you been doing with yourself?"

## CHAPTER XI

### A Surly Rival

"You sure look like something that the cat dragged in," observed Roy Benedict.

Ted Scott laughed.

"Wouldn't take a prize at a beauty show, you think?" he said. "Fact is, I had a little adventure on the way," and he narrated briefly his experience in battling the forest fire.

"Always on the job," commented Ed Allenby. "But come on in now and let's put something on those burns to take the smart out. Then we'll have supper and a chinfest. Gee, but it's good to see you back again, old boy!"

They were moving toward the mess hall when another aviator whom Ted had never seen before came sauntering along.

"That's the Felwig I told you about in my letter," said Bill in an undertone.

Ted glanced at the newcomer with interest. Felwig was a man of medium height, stockily built and with unusually long arms for his size. His head was covered with a thatch of sandy

hair, his lips were thick and greasy, and his cold, pale eyes were set rather close together. He wore a sneering look that seemed to be habitual.

He stopped as the group of airmen approached and surveyed Ted insolently.

"Ain't you fellows going to give me a knockdown?" he asked of the group.

"Sure," replied Bill, though rather grudgingly. "Ted, this is Sam Felwig. Felwig, this is Ted Scott."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Felwig," said Ted pleasantly, as he extended his hand.

The hand was still grimed somewhat from the smoke of the fire, and Felwig took it gingerly. He dropped it promptly and rubbed his own hand vigorously and ostentatiously on his trousers leg.

Ted flushed but kept his temper. But Bill went up in the air.

"You asked for a knockdown, Felwig," he growled. "I've a mind to give you one of a different kind."

"Aw, I didn't mean nothing," mumbled Felwig, retreating a step. "But I'd just washed up for supper. You fellers are mighty touchy, it seems to me."

"My mistake, Mr. Felwig," said Ted coldly. "It won't be repeated. You won't have to shake hands with me again."

"No loss to me," snapped Felwig. "I ain't no hero worshiper, like a lot of fools I know of."

He strolled away and Ed Allenby started after him, but Ted laid a restraining hand on his friend's arm.

"Let him alone, Ed," he counseled. "He only amuses me. Leave him to stew in his own juice."

"Didn't I tell you in my letter that he rubbed everybody the wrong way?" asked Bill Twombley, as they went on. "It's a gift he has. Can't be with you two minutes without insulting you."

"He's got three lickings since he's been here, and several more of the boys are just on edge to get at him," added Roy Benedict. "But he can never learn to hold that nasty tongue of his. He's the pest of this camp."

"He seems to brighten the corner where he is," grinned Ted. "He's got the gentle art of making enemies down to perfection."

They washed face and hands and sat down to supper. Ted looked around and noted that Felwig was missing.

"Where is our little sunshine?" he asked. "Doesn't he eat his meals with the rest of you fellows?"

"No," replied Bill. "And I'm glad of it. He sure would spoil my appetite. He takes his

grub with Steiner, the new manager of the outfit."

"Must have a drag with him," commented Ted, as he cut a bit of steak.

"Relative of his, I believe," put in Ed. "They came here together and they're as thick as two thieves. That's one thing that makes Felwig so offensive, in addition to his ingrowing disposition. He boasts that he has the inside track and can do just about as he pleases. He's dead sure that he's got your job."

"That's interesting," replied Ted. "So I'm about to be cast out into the cold, cold world, am I?"

"If Felwig's right, you are," declared Roy. "He was saying only yesterday that the force is complete now and that you might as well look for a new job. Said he had it straight from Steiner. If he's right, it's a dirty shame."

"Oh, I won't be begging handouts," laughed Ted. "Though I'd be awfully sorry to leave you fellows," he added.

"You'd have a hundred offers in twenty-four hours, if it became known that you were free," stated Bill. "But it gets my goat that a hound like that Felwig should have something to gloat over."

"Perhaps he won't do so much gloating as he imagines," returned Ted. "I'll drop in and see Steiner to-morrow morning and report for

duty. That will call for a showdown, and I'll know exactly where I stand."

Accordingly the next morning he called upon the new manager. He found him in his office looking over a sheaf of papers.

Mr. Steiner was a man of middle age, slightly bald, rather cold and stand-offish in manner. He had come from the East, where he had been known as a capable executive. Ted had heard of him slightly in connection with another division of the former Government air mail service, but had never met him.

He glanced up as Ted entered.

"Well?" he said in a tone of inquiry.

"This is Mr. Steiner, I believe," said Ted. "My name is Scott, Ted Scott."

"Oh," replied Steiner, rising with a cordiality that seemed to Ted rather effusive. "The Scott that flew the Atlantic! I'm glad to meet you. Take a seat. What can I do for you, Mr. Scott?"

"I've called to report for duty," replied Ted, as he took the chair that the manager had indicated.

Steiner looked puzzled.

"For duty," he repeated slowly. "For duty. I'm afraid I don't quite understand. For what duty?"

"In carrying the air mail," replied Ted, feeling himself getting hot under the collar.

"My leave of absence was up yesterday, and I got back last night."

"But you are not an employee of this corporation, are you?" asked Steiner, still with that puzzled air.

"Why, technically I suppose I'm not," replied Ted. "But I understood that those who were formerly under the Government were to be taken over in a body by the leasing corporations. I see that the rest of the boys have been retained."

"Now isn't that too bad?" exclaimed Steiner, with a grieved expression. "No, the corporations are under no obligations to retain the old men. Naturally they would retain most of them because of their experience and training, but they have an entirely free hand in the matter. You see, Mr. Scott, you ceased to be connected with the service when the transfer was made. I had to make up my force while you were away. I had not heard from you and didn't know whether you intended to come back or not. I knew that you had a lot of offers crowding in upon you. So what could I do? I had to get my force in shape. And now I have all the men I need. Dear me! It's too bad! Of course I'd have liked to have you with us if I could. But now, unfortunately, it's too late. I'm dreadfully sorry!"

He seemed almost on the point of shedding

tears. But Ted knew that they would have been crocodile tears.

The adroit manager had succeeded very cleverly in putting Ted in the wrong in not having made his application under the new régime. Technically, his position seemed to be sound. But actually it was sheer sophistry. Steiner had every reason to believe that Ted intended to come back and the pretense that he did not simply served as a pretext for putting his own relative, Felwig, in Ted's place.

At this instant, Felwig himself thrust his head inside the door.

"The big noise is coming, Izzy," he announced and vanished.

Steiner rose hastily to his feet.

"He means the president of the corporation," he said with an apologetic smile at the familiarity shown by his subordinate. "I'll have to say good-by to you now, Mr. Scott. Awfully sorry we could not get together. If I can ever be of any service to you, let me know."

Before Ted could reply the door opened and a big, shaggy-browed man with an air of authority breezed in.

"Morning, Steiner," he greeted. "How's everything going?"

"Fine, Mr. Bruin," returned the manager, with an obsequious smile, hastily bringing forward a chair.

Ted started at the name and looked toward the newcomer. Their eyes met in instant recognition.

"Well, bless my soul and body!" roared Maxwell Bruin as he took Ted's hand in both his brawny ones and wrung it with the grip of a vice. "If it isn't Ted Scott! Just got back from your vacation, eh? Heard you were off on a leave of absence. Well, well, if you aren't a sight for sore eyes."

The manager's face was a sight. Chagrin, discomfiture, fear, chased each other across his features.

"Sit down! Sit down!" commanded Mr. Bruin to Ted, as he himself took a chair and lighted a cigar. "You're not going to get away from me as easy as this. Did I ever tell you, Steiner, of the way Scott saved my boy's life?"

"I don't think you have," murmured Steiner, licking his dry lips.

"That's what he did," declared Mr. Bruin, crossing his legs comfortably. "Took Dr. Yaley across the mountains at the risk of his life in the teeth of the fiercest blizzard of the winter. Only man that would have dared to do it. Only man that could have done it. I tell you, he's put me under a debt that I can never repay."

"Great!" mumbled Steiner.

"I'll tell the world it was," declared Mr.

Bruin emphatically. "I'm as proud as Punch, Ted Scott, to have you working with my company. Told the printers to put it into the prospectuses that Ted Scott, the conqueror of the Atlantic, was the star aviator of the Bruin Air Mail Corporation."

Steiner looked at Ted so imploringly that the latter took pity on him.

"All right, Mr. Bruin," Ted replied. "That is," he added, "if you'll employ me all over again, now that I'm out of the Government service."

"If we'll employ you!" roared Mr. Bruin. "Listen to him, Steiner. Doesn't that give you the biggest laugh you've had in a dog's age? If we'll employ him! I ask you, Steiner, isn't that a joke?"

"It's a great joke," agreed Steiner.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Mysterious Ticking

"You stand number one on my list, Ted Scott," went on Mr. Bruin, "and you'll have first choice of routes. That's understood, is it, Steiner? Mr. Scott has his pick."

"Certainly," assented the unhappy Steiner, ready to sink through the floor at the humiliation that the president of the corporation was unwittingly heaping upon him.

"That's awfully good of you, Mr. Bruin," put in Ted. "I won't take advantage of it by choosing the easiest. As a matter of fact, I want the most dangerous, because it will give me the most valuable experience."

"Might have known as much, you young daredevil," laughed Mr. Bruin, slapping Ted jovially on the knee. "Well, have it your own way."

"How is your son getting along?" asked Ted, seeking to change the conversation for Steiner's sake.

"Fine and dandy," was the reply. "He's

getting around now on crutches, and Yaley says that in a week or two he'll be able to discard them altogether. And say, if you could hear the way that boy talks about you! He thinks you're the greatest thing that ever happened. And, by Jove, he's right! As soon as he gets entirely well we're going to have a grand blowout to celebrate, and you're going to be the guest of honor."

"Thank you very much," said Ted. "Give Frank my regards and tell him I'll be glad to come."

"Bully!" said Mr. Bruin.

"I guess I'd better be going now," said Ted, rising. "You want to talk business with Mr. Steiner, and I want to give my plane a good grooming after the long trip I've just taken."

"All right," assented Mr. Bruin. "But don't miss that blowout. No excuses, mind!"

"I won't miss it," promised Ted.

As he went out he caught again that imploring look from Steiner. Ted knew what he meant as clearly as though he had put it into words. The manager was begging him not to betray his discomfiture to the rest of the men.

Ted hesitated a moment, then gave the slightest reassuring nod of the head, and the manager heaved a sigh of relief.

"How about it, old sock?" asked Bill eagerly, as Ted came to the place where he and others

of his closest friends were working on their planes.

"Everything's all right," replied Ted. "I stay."

"Glory hallelujah!" bellowed Bill, and was hilariously echoed by the others.

"But how did you manage it?" asked Ed. "I understood that the skids were greased and all ready to put under you."

"You don't see me sliding, do you?" laughed Ted. "No, everything's all right. Saw Mr. Bruin and Steiner, and they both agreed. Just a matter now of going to work."

"What about Felwig?" asked Roy Benedict.

"Don't know," replied Ted. "His name didn't come up in the conversation at all."

"Won't be shooting off his face so much now," prophesied Roy.

"Anything that puts a silencer on that blowhard is all right with me," declared Bill.

"Can't get the rights of it even yet," murmured Ed with a puzzled expression. "Felwig certainly seemed to be a prime favorite with Steiner. They've been in cahoots right along. He's a relative of his, too."

"Oh, any one has a right to change his mind," said Ted carelessly. "Lend me a hand, will you, Bill, with this propeller?"

Later in the morning, Ted came across Felwig, sitting moodily on a box in his hangar.

Ted nodded to him pleasantly enough, and was passing on when Felwig spoke to him.

"Think you've put one over on me, don't you?" he snarled, his eyes full of sullen hate.

"I don't get you," replied Ted. "I haven't tried to put one over on you or any one else." He spoke coldly, and started to move away.

"Didn't you use your pull with Bruin to get the job I was slated for?" demanded Felwig.

"Didn't know when I went to Steiner's office that Mr. Bruin was anywhere round," answered Ted, stopping again, but still speaking in a cool, even voice. "Didn't even know that he was the head of the corporation. He just happened to come in while I was there, and he gave me a job without my even asking for it."

"That's the way you put it," sneered Felwig.

"Do you mean to say I'm not telling the truth?" asked Ted, quickly advancing toward Felwig.

"I'm not sayin' that," replied Felwig, glancing fearfully at Ted's clinched fist. "But I had that job promised to me and you've gone and snitched it."

"Now look here, Felwig," said Ted sharply, "I'm getting fed up with that kind of talk. You had it all fixed up that I should get the sack. Well, I didn't get it. I was in this service long before you were, and Mr. Bruin wants me to stay in it. I'm standing on my

own feet, and you'll have to stand on yours. I haven't any hard feelings toward you, and I wish you luck."

"Wishes are cheap," sneered Felwig.

"So are some men I know," retorted Ted hotly.

"You think that because you flew across the Atlantic—a thing any man could do who had luck—that you're a little tin god on wheels," growled Felwig. "I'm just as good a flier as you are—and then some."

"Better, I hope," replied Ted serenely.

"A fake hero!" snapped out Felwig.

Ted, who had started to walk away, whirled about sharply.

"Are you looking for a fight, Felwig?" he asked. "Because if you are, you can have it right now. I understand that almost everybody in the camp has licked you, and I might as well take my turn."

Felwig retreated as Ted stepped toward him with eyes blazing.

"I ain't looking for a fight," he muttered.

"Then put a muzzle on that tongue of yours, or you'll find yourself in a fight whether you're looking for it or not," commanded Ted. "I've stood all I'm going to from you. Get me?"

Felwig "got him" without difficulty, and, muttering sullenly something that Ted could not understand, he slunk away.

That afternoon Ted saw Steiner again to make arrangements for his route.

As he went into the office he saw Felwig and Steiner, their heads close together in earnest conversation. The heads sprang apart as though on springs, as Ted came in.

Felwig got to his feet.

"I'll see you later about that, then," he said to Steiner as he went out, throwing a malignant look at Ted as he passed him.

"Come right in, Mr. Scott," said Steiner, with a great show of warmth. "No, not that chair. Take this. It's more comfortable."

Ted smiled inwardly at the change of manner.

"I was a little too hasty this morning," went on Steiner, rubbing his hands and smiling fulsomely. "Fact is, I was deeply absorbed with my papers and my wits were wool gathering. I have no doubt that on a little deeper reflection I would have come to the same conclusion that Mr. Bruin did. I'm very glad that he came in when he did, for I realize now what a loss you would have been to our service."

"Kind of you to say so," replied Ted.

"And I trust, Mr. Scott," went on Steiner, the rubbing of his hands becoming a little more pronounced, "that you haven't—or you won't—mention the little misunderstanding, either to Mr. Bruin or the rest of the people here."

"Haven't said a word, and I won't," replied Ted, and he noted the look of relief that came into the manager's eyes.

"And now about my route," went on Ted, as he spread a map on the manager's desk and drew up his chair.

They went over it in detail. None of the routes could be said to be easy, for the Rockies intervened somewhere between the cities that formed the terminals for that division. But there was one section where a number of peaks rose to a height of from twelve to fifteen thousand feet.

Those peaks were challenges to Ted, and his blood tingled as he studied them. There would be no monotony on that route. The airman who flew it would have to be on the alert every instant. Even in fair weather that would be true, and when a fog gathered or a storm was raging, the dangers would be multiplied enormously.

But the greater the danger the greater the lure for Ted Scott's adventurous spirit, and his pulse quickened as he studied it.

"I'll take that route, if I may," he announced at last, looking up at Steiner.

"You may," replied the manager, with a smile. "All the other boys have been fighting shy of it. You're a glutton for punishment, Mr. Scott."

They settled all the details, and then Ted left the office and started furbishing up his plane.

"Got to be on your mettle now, old girl," he murmured, as he patted the *Hapworth* caressingly. "We're in on a tough proposition. But you've never let me down yet, and I'll bet you never will," and it almost seemed to Ted that the humming of the motor of the gallant plane conveyed to him a message of reassurance.

The schedule was so arranged that part of Ted Scott's work was by night and another part by day. He was glad of the latter fact, because it gave him a chance to become thoroughly familiar with his route.

At the start of his work, he was favored with fair weather, and everything went smoothly. The *Hapworth* worked like a charm, and he was seldom a minute behind in arriving at his destination. Before long many people in both towns were setting their clocks by the roaring of his plane overhead.

The scenery over which he passed was magnificent in its sublimity. Giant peaks towered high into the clouds. Great gorges cleft the mountains, and, far below, torrents tore along at the bottoms of the canyons.

Sometimes for hundreds of miles at a stretch the young mail carrier hardly saw a human being or a habitation. The mountains were untenanted to a large extent save by eagles,

panthers, grizzly bears and rattlesnakes. Ted wondered at times what it would be to be lost in this vast rocky wilderness.

About a week had passed when one day, to his surprise, he found on arriving at headquarters that Felwig was still in the camp. He had not seen the fellow since their last flare-up, and thought that he had sought new pastures.

"What's the big idea?" asked Ted of Bill, nodding his head in the direction of Felwig, who was just disappearing in his hangar.

"Yes, he's here," answered Bill disgustedly. "Steiner's cooked up a job for him as a substitute flier. We don't need him any more than a centipede needs another leg. Still, I suppose he'll come in once in a while, if one of us falls sick."

"Probably he's praying that one of us will break his neck or something," growled Roy.

"If we don't, he'll try to answer his own prayers," put in Ed Allenby. "I wouldn't put it past him to try any dirty trick. Especially on you, Ted. Keep your eyes open, old boy. He hates you for some reason or other."

"Oh, I'm not lying awake nights worrying," responded Ted carelessly.

There were a number of letters for Ted. One was from Mr. Hapworth congratulating him on the success of his book and speaking of the many favorable reviews it had received,

and was still receiving in some of the foreign papers.

Other letters were from Mark Lawson and from the Chicago firm of lawyers, but in neither did he find good news. Still, hope of the recovery of his lost money was not entirely shut out, for the accountants were still investigating the books of Clegg & Company, the bankrupt brokers, though, as Mark wrote, the hope was a slender one and was growing thinner each week that passed.

Another week passed and then, one evening, as Ted was adjusting some of the mail bags in his plane, preparatory to starting, a faint ticking sound came to his ears.

At first he thought it must be his clock fastened on the dial in front of the cockpit. He listened intently.

No, it was not that. The ticking sound issued from one of the mail bags.

Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Tick-tock!

A thought came to Ted that made his flesh creep.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A Close Call

The thought that came to Ted Scott was one that might well cause the cheek of the bravest to blanch.

Was it possible that the mail bag held an infernal machine—one of those satanic contrivances that was moved by clockwork, timed to explode at any minute the maker might choose?

Ted looked around for the manager. But Steiner on that day had gone over to Lumberport, summoned there by Mr. Bruin, who wanted to consult him on a matter of pressing importance.

But Bill Twombley and Roy Benedict were near at hand, getting ready for their own trips, and in obedience to Ted's urgent call they came hurrying toward him.

"What is it, Ted?" asked Roy.

"Listen!" replied Ted, holding up one hand and pointing to the mail bag in which he had located the sound. "Hear anything?"

They listened intently.

"Sounds like a clock," pronounced Roy, after a moment.

"A devil's clock!" roared Bill, across whom flashed the same thought that had startled Ted. "That's an infernal machine, I'll bet my boots! Let's get that bag out of there, quick!"

They yanked the bag from the machine, and Ted quickly tore it open. He traced the ticking to a conical shaped package, tightly wrapped and sealed.

Now the ticking was louder and they could hear a subdued whir as if of machinery.

"For the love of Pete, drop it, fling it away!" cried Bill. "It may go off at any moment!"

At a little distance was an old disused well, that for a long while had held no water. Ted ran over and threw the package down. They heard the thud as it struck the bottom.

All three breathed more freely.

"Gee, but that gave me a scare!" exclaimed Bill. "If that had gone off while Ted was holding it, we'd all have gone up in smoke."

"That is, provided that it is a bomb," said Ted. "It may prove a harmless bit of mail after all, and then we'll feel foolish."

"It's a mighty good idea to throw a thing like that away first and investigate afterward," declared Roy. "We had enough to go by. If that doesn't prove to be a bomb, I'll eat my hat."

"It would have been nice to have had that go off when you were ten thousand feet up in the air," observed Bill. "It would have blown you and the plane into bits. No one would ever have known what had become of you."

"How in thunder do you suppose it got there?" asked Ted.

"Not of its own accord, you can bet," answered Bill. "Somebody put it there. Some of those Reds, maybe, that's always raising ructions. Those fellows wouldn't stick at anything. Just some of their pure cussedness, maybe. But the main thing is, it was there."

"Lucky you heard that ticking," put in Roy. "That old rabbit's foot of yours is sure on the job."

"Well, I can't wait any longer," said Ted, looking at his watch. "Tell the other fellows, and tell them, also, not to go too close to that well. If it really does blow up while I'm gone, tell them to note the time of the explosion."

He started the motor and jumped into the cockpit. The mechanics knocked away the blocks in front of the machine, and after a short dash down the runway Ted lifted the *Hapworth* into the air.

He had plenty of food for thought on that journey. If that had really been a bomb—and he felt convinced that he had made no mistake—his escape was little short of miraculous.

Who were the authors of the nefarious plot? Was Bill correct in his conjecture about the Reds?

He knew to what extremes some of the unbalanced fanatics were ready to go. Human life counted for little with them. They cared nothing for the death of a few, if thereby they might terrify and coerce a whole nation.

A certain color was lent to the idea by the fact that the package had been put in a bag of mail that was to be carried by his special plane. To blow up an unknown airman would not be spectacular enough. But to blow up Ted Scott, the idol of the nation, would cause a horror that would spread throughout the world and create a sensation over which the perpetrators of the crime would never get through chuckling.

Yes, it was possible. But, Ted thought, *barely* possible. He was inclined to look for another explanation, and there were two others.

One was that the supposed bomb was intended for the person to whom it was addressed and was timed to explode after it had reached its destination or when it should be opened by the person who received it. Ted wished he had noted the address.

One alternative remained.

That was that the bomb was designed purely and solely for the destruction of Ted Scott himself!

Ted dwelt grimly on this possibility.

If this were true, the bomb had been placed there by some one who hated him, and hated him most bitterly to go to such extremes.

There were just three people that Ted included in his list of possibilities as perpetrators of the outrage.

Two were the Gale brothers. They had taken the chance more than once of maiming or killing him. But they were far away, and he put them out of the question. Besides, it would have been very difficult for them to have access to the mail bags.

For the more he thought of it, the more Ted became convinced that the infernal machine had been inserted in the bag after it had left the post office. Otherwise, it would have been almost certain that some clerk would have heard the ticking, would have thought the package suspect and remitted it for examination to the department that dealt with such things.

Then, if it was put in afterward, it was necessary to find some one who not only hated Ted but had easy access to the bags. And there was just one man that met those requirements.

Sam Felwig!

Ted hated to entertain the thought. It seemed ungenerous. He did not want to accuse any one unjustly, even in his mind. But the

suspicion kept tugging at him and refused to leave him.

He shuddered as he looked down at the earth ten thousand feet below. Suppose while he had been sailing along serenely that bomb had exploded! There would not have been enough of him left for a funeral.

He ardently hoped that when he should return to Denver he would find that the package had been harmless after all. For it was not a pleasant thought that some sneaking, malignant foe was planning to destroy him.

The trip to Pocatello and back passed without incident, and Ted descended to the flying field in Denver late in the afternoon.

Roy was still absent on his route, but Bill and Ed had come in from theirs a little while before. They greeted Ted with unusual warmth as he jumped from the cockpit of his plane.

"Gee, it's good to see you all whole instead of in little pieces!" exclaimed Bill.

"I told you that old rabbit's foot of yours was on the job," added Ed.

"By which I judge that something happened while I was away," returned Ted.

"It did," declared Bill. "It did, emphatically. Look at the ground around that old well hole."

Ted looked and saw that the edges of the hole were torn and jagged, while little billows of

earth about it testified to some rending force.

"Then that was an infernal machine after all?" asked Ted eagerly.

"Yes," assented Bill. "Guessed it the first time. That thing had power enough in it to have shattered a regiment."

"When did it go off?" asked Ted.

"Just about two hours after you left," replied Ed.

Two hours! Ted thought for a minute. Two hours after he had left Denver he was flying over one of the most desolate and rugged parts of the mountains. Down in those frightful gorges where human foot had never trodden, the chances would have been a hundred to one that what would have been left of him and his plane would never have been discovered.

Yes, whoever had set the time for the bomb to explode had shown fiendish cunning. Had it succeeded, the crime could never have been placed on the guilty one. In fact, no one would know that a crime had been committed.

"What's been done about it?" Ted asked.

"It's being investigated of course," replied Bill. "But we've been told to keep it under our hats for the time. Don't want to warn the guilty one and all that, you know—all the guff they use when they haven't a thing to go on and are all at sea. But come in now and get some grub, and we'll talk it over later."

After supper the three adjourned to Ted's quarters.

"Now who did this thing?" blurted out Bill.

Ted looked at Ed and Ed looked at Ted. Then they looked at Bill. And Bill looked at the others in turn.

"I see," grinned Bill. "We're all thinking of the same man, but because we haven't any proof, no one likes to name him first. See here."

He tore three strips of paper from a pad on a desk.

"Each of us write the name of the man we suspect and we'll look at them at the same time," he proposed.

They did so. The same name appeared on each strip.

Felwig!

## CHAPTER XIV

### On the Alert

"Three minds with but a single thought," murmured Ted Scott, as he looked at the papers.

"Does seem to be unanimous," agreed Ed. "Order the prisoner to be shot at sunrise."

"It isn't a laughing matter," put in Bill, his usually jolly face extremely serious. "Here's murder been attempted and the most sneaking and cowardly kind of murder. And we all have the same idea as to the possible murderer. No, there's no milder word for it," he added in answer to a protesting gesture from Ted.

"I wonder," mused Ted slowly, "how much of this is really our cool judgment and how much is due to our dislike for Felwig. He's as popular with all of us as poison ivy. Perhaps that helps to sway our opinions."

"I don't suppose we can get clear of that altogether," admitted Ed. "I'm basing my judgment on two things. One is that Felwig hates you, while all the other boys like you.

The other is that he's the meanest skunk in the outfit and the only one that could possibly think of such a thing."

"That wouldn't go very far in a court of law," remarked Ted.

"I've got something a little more than that," said Bill. "A little while before you started off that afternoon I was passing by Felwig's hangar. He was sitting with his back toward me, and on a bench in front of him was the map of the routes. I glanced at it as I went by and he had a pencil in his hand and was tracing out your special route, the one between Denver and Pocatello. Now, why was he so interested in that one route and no other?"

"I'll answer that!" exclaimed Ed. "He was figuring out just where Ted was likely to be at the time the bomb went off."

"Maybe," conceded Ted reluctantly.

"But here's another thing!" went on Bill. "Just as I was passing, Felwig heard me, and he jumped as though he had been shot and crumpled up the map in his hand. Why should he do that, unless he was nervous and didn't want me to see what he'd been doing?"

"Does seem strange," admitted Ted.

"Of course it was strange!" declared Bill. "You wouldn't have done it, Ed wouldn't have done it, no one would have done it, if he had been innocent of anything wrong."

"Here's something else," added Ed. "I'd started on my route and wasn't here when the infernal machine exploded. But Roy was here, and he told me that while everybody else was excited as the dickens and rejoicing at your narrow escape Felwig was going round with a face like a funeral."

"All those things look bad, of course," conceded Ted. "They help toward a moral certainty. Still, there isn't a scintilla of real proof."

"I wish it were enough to cause his arrest, anyway," declared Ed. "If the cops got hold of him, they might tangle him up so he'd give the whole thing away. He's yellow and he wouldn't stand the gaff for long."

Then, next morning, Ted was summoned to Steiner's office.

"Of course, Mr. Scott, you've heard of that infernal machine that was in one of your bags of mail and exploded after you had left," the manager began, after the usual greetings were over.

"Yes," replied Ted. "The boys were telling me about it."

"It was an abominable thing, and I can't tell you how glad and thankful I am at your narrow escape," went on Steiner.

"It was rather too close for comfort," replied Ted.

He had been watching Steiner narrowly, for he knew how intimate was the bond that bound him to Felwig. He had wondered whether Steiner had possibly been a party to the plot.

But that thought vanished at the genuine concern in Steiner's voice and eyes. Mean and shifty the manager might be, but he was not a would-be murderer.

"It would have been a frightful thing for you personally," went on Steiner, "and it would have been a black eye for the service. Have you any idea how the thing happened—who might have been concerned in it?"

"I haven't a particle of proof," replied Ted evasively.

"We're doing our utmost to hunt out the perpetrator," asserted Steiner. "Of course, since it concerned itself with the mails, it's a matter primarily for the Federal secret service. We've put it in their hands and they're working on it. So far, we've kept it away from the newspapers, and I hope we can continue to do so until the thing is cleared up. My own idea is that it's the work of radicals, some fanatics who wanted to create a sensation and give the idea that they're far more important than they really are."

"It's possible," admitted Ted.

"I hope it may prove to be that," went on the manager. "Otherwise, it might be thought

that it was the outcome of a private grudge, an attack directed against you personally. You haven't any enemies that you know of, have you?"

"None that would have the slightest reason to do a thing like that, I hope." Ted was determined not to mention Felwig's name until he had some definite proof.

"By the way," said Steiner, after they had discussed the matter a little further," Mr. Bruin wanted me to tell you that the blowout, as he called it, would take place to-night, and he wanted you to be sure to make it."

"Good!" said Ted. "I'll be there with bells on. Lucky too, because this is my day off and I won't have to miss a trip."

"Oh, one other thing, too," went on Steiner. "The mail on your route has grown so heavy that you'll have to use a bigger plane."

"Is that so?" asked Ted regretfully. He was sorry, for he was so attached to the *Hapworth* that it had come to seem a part of himself. Still, he had known that the change was due, for the *Hapworth* had not been originally designed for mail carrying purposes, and had been uncomfortably crowded on the last few trips.

"In a way, that's a compliment to you," said Steiner, with a smile. "The people on your route have been so pleased with the promptness

and certainty with which the mail is delivered that more and more they are patronizing the air service instead of relying on the railroads. Mr. Bruin spoke to me about that the other day, and of course he's delighted."

Naturally, this was pleasing to Ted, as showing that his work was appreciated; but he knew it would be some time before he felt as much at home in any plane as he had in the gallant machine that had carried him so swiftly over the seas and later back and forth over the flooded districts along the Mississippi.

The biplane that was assigned him proved to be a good one of excellent make and almost new. He went up in it that same day and spent a couple of hours in the air, testing it out, getting acquainted with its tricks and foibles, until he felt that he had mastered it thoroughly.

Then, a couple of hours before dusk, he dressed in his best and turned the nose of his plane toward Lumberport.

He thought with lively satisfaction of the difference between this trip and the one he had made in the teeth of a howling blizzard a few weeks before.

Then he had been battling for life, not only for his own life and for that of his passenger, but for the life of the stricken youth toward whom he was speeding.

He thought of other things, too, chiefly of

Eben and Charity Browning. He was worried about the latter because, in the latest letter he had received from her, he had read between the lines that she was none too well.

Dear Eben and Charity! How good they had been to him! They had taken the place of father and mother to him.

Father and mother! But why had they had to? What mystery enveloped his birth? The Wilsons, had they lived until he was older, might have enlightened him. But when they had passed away they had left no word. Eben and Charity, who had adopted him later, seemed wholly ignorant of his parentage. And with every year that passed the possibility of unraveling the mystery seemed more remote.

What would he have given to know who his parents were, whether they were alive or dead, why he had been left a waif to the mercies of the world! Would he ever know?

He roused himself from these musings as Lumberport came into view.

There was no need now of landing among the haystacks, as he had on his first visit, for since Mr. Bruin had organized his air service corporation, he had transformed a level meadow adjoining his estate into a landing field.

As Ted came in sight of it he noted it was already thronged with people. The news that he was coming had outrun him, and practically

the whole population of the town had turned out to give him a cordial reception.

In recognition of this, Ted did what he knew they were longing for and gave them an exhibition of daring stunts that made their hair stand on end before he finally came down to a graceful landing.

People crowded about him with acclamations, and it was some time before he could make his way to the veranda of the big house, where Maxwell Bruin and Frank—there was no Mrs. Bruin—gave him a royal welcome.

"Here you are safe and sound," roared the elder man as he wrung Ted's hand, "even if those scoundrels did try to blow you up with their infernal machine."

"My luck still holds," replied Ted, smiling.

"Gee, but I'm glad to see you!" exclaimed Frank, as he threw his arm over Ted's shoulder. "I've been aching to see you and thank you again for having saved my life. I couldn't half express myself when you were here before."

"You look as though you had never had a sick day in your life," responded Ted. "You sure are a husky specimen."

"Feel like a fighting cock," laughed Frank.

He was indeed a fine specimen of physical manhood. Tall as Ted himself, he was lithe and sinewy, with every evidence of a reserve of

muscular power. His blue eyes were frank and humorous, his manner free from snobbishness or affection, and Ted mentally dubbed him "a regular fellow."

And there was nothing formal or conventional about the celebration that they had that night. The guests comprised most of the people of the township, plain people, farmers, tradesmen and woodsmen. They overflowed the big house and verandas and spread out on the lawn, that was lighted with Japanese lanterns.

There was an abundant supper, and afterward the young people danced to their hearts content to the music of a stringed orchestra that had been brought from Denver for the occasion.

There were many bright-eyed, pretty girls who fluttered about Ted Scott like so many butterflies, all hoping that they might get a dance with the national hero. Ted was nothing loath. He was enjoying himself immensely. It had been a long time since he had let himself go so thoroughly and enjoyably.

But he looked in vain all through the evening for one girl who did not come. Mr. and Mrs. Wilburton were there, and were as cordial to Ted as ever. He was tempted to ask where Bessie was, but something told him that it might be an awkward question, and he refrained.

It was midnight before the festivities were over and the people began to stream away. Ted, of course, was to stay over night, and he stood with the father and son on the veranda as they said good-by to their guests.

When all were gone, Maxwell Bruin sat with the young men conversing for a time and then said good-night and retired.

"Some party that you had to-night, Frank," commented Ted. "You certainly treated them well. Good food, good music, good dancing. I've nearly danced my feet off."

"I saw you had no lack of partners," remarked Frank, his eyes twinkling.

"Mighty pretty ones too," laughed Ted. "There's no lack of beauty in this town, I'll tell the world!"

"Now you're talking," assented Frank.

"But after all," Ted went on, watching Frank narrowly, "the prettiest girl in town wasn't here."

Frank looked up at him quickly.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked.

"Bessie Wilburton," was the reply.

## CHAPTER XV

### The Revelation

Was it only imagination on Ted Scott's part, or had Frank Bruin winced at the mention of Bessie Wilburton's name?

"So you think that Bessie Wilburton is the prettiest girl in this town, do you?" Frank asked.

"I sure do!" replied Ted. "Don't you?"

It was a home thrust, and its effect was immediate.

"Do I?" cried Frank, starting up from his chair. "You bet I do! The prettiest girl in this town? Why, she's the prettiest girl in the whole United States! And the cleverest! And the sweetest!"

Ted was startled by the outburst. Frank himself seemed to be, and settled back in his chair a little sheepishly.

"Guess you think I'm going loco," he muttered. "Don't often let myself go that way."

"You do speak with a certain enthusiasm, to put it mildly," grinned Ted. "But I don't

blame you a bit. She's certainly a most charming girl."

"The best ever," declared Frank. "The mould was broken when she was made."

"Lucky man that gets her for a wife," hazarded Ted.

"Lucky's no name for it," assented Frank. "She's a pearl. She's a jewel. She's a treasure. She's——"

He hesitated.

"Don't stop," urged Ted. "I'm just learning how many nice words there are in the English language."

"Well, she's all of them and then some," declared Frank.

"If I thought a girl was all that, I'd ask her to marry me," ventured Ted.

"I have," confessed Frank, who seemed glad to unburden himself to a sympathetic soul. "She said she would. But that's all off now. I'm not good enough for her," he added bitterly.

"Surely she never said that," observed Ted, surprised.

"Not in so many words," admitted Frank. "The trouble is," he went on, "she thinks I'm too wild and reckless. I've got that confounded urge in me to do things that a cautious fellow wouldn't think of doing. I've been brought home clawed up by a grizzly. I was nearly

knocked out when I bet that I could take a canoe over a waterfall. And you see what this latest freak of mine has brought me."

"Well," said Ted judicially, "you can't blame a girl for wanting her husband to come home whole at night instead of being brought home in little pieces."

"I suppose not," Frank agreed, laughing despite himself at the picture that Ted had conjured up. "But she might have had a little patience with me. I promised that I'd give those things up."

"I see," said Ted. "How about the canoe episode? Was that before or after you had given that promise?"

"After," confessed Frank a little shamefacedly.

"And she got sore at you and you had words and there was a general flare up?" continued Ted.

"Something like that," admitted Frank.

"Then you were sorry and she was sorry, and yet each one of you had too much confounded pride to say so," Ted went on.

"I know I was sorry," said Frank, "but I don't know whether she was or not."

"Well, I'm willing to bet she was and is," declared Ted emphatically. "If you could have seen how broken up she was when she heard of this last accident, you'd believe it too. She

was nearly out of her head with grief. The girl's dead in love with you, and don't you forget it."

"I wish I could believe it," muttered Frank.

"Why don't you ask her and find out?" demanded Ted. "You can't expect the girl to make the first advances."

"I haven't had a chance since the accident," explained Frank. "Why didn't she come to see me while I was laid up? She'd have done that if she'd cared for me. Why wasn't she here to-night? She was invited, but made a pretext of another engagement in Denver."

"Doesn't want to seem to be running after you, maybe," suggested Ted. "Probably thinks it's up to you to do the running. If you do, you'll catch her all right. She's only hoping to be caught."

"I haven't told you everything," said Frank. "I'm afraid she is caught already."

"Oh, there's another man, is there?" questioned Ted. "Somebody that's been making hay while you've been sulking in your tent! But what makes you think he's had any luck? Who is he, anyway?"

"Prentice is his name," replied Frank. "He's a rich lumberman, living about twenty miles from here, and he's been paying her marked attention for a long while. But I cut him out, and he vanished from the scene. Then

this quarrel came, and I've heard that he's been calling to see her as often as he could, and about a week ago I heard that they were engaged."

"Just talk, probably," said Ted soothingly. "You know how those rumors get about."

"I'm afraid this is more than rumor," said Frank sadly. "I got it pretty straight from a fellow who knows Prentice well. He told me that Prentice himself told him that he was engaged to Bessie Wilburton and that they expected to be married next fall."

"That's too bad," said Ted sympathetically. "But even at that, I wouldn't quit till I got it straight from the girl herself. Perhaps Prentice was only boasting. Or perhaps he hoped the story would reach you and that you'd think it was true and give the matter up."

"By Jove, I hadn't looked at it that way!" exclaimed Frank, brightening up. "You may be right! At any rate, I'll do as you say and go straight to headquarters. But I've bored you enough, telling you of my troubles. Now tell me something about yourself. Father was saying that you lost a lot of money from the crash of a crooked brokerage firm. Tell me about it."

"Not much to tell," replied Ted ruefully. "I guess it's only a new illustration of the fact that a fool and his money are soon parted."

"How much did they sting you for?" asked Frank.

"Twenty thousand dollars," was the answer.

Frank whistled.

"Quite a lot of money to lose," he remarked.

"Altogether too much," agreed Ted.

"Any chance of getting some of it back?" asked Frank.

"Oh, nothing to speak of, I'm afraid," replied Ted. "A few cents on the dollar, perhaps. One of the partners has disappeared. Two others, I saw in this morning's paper, have been put in jail. That, of course, is some satisfaction. But after all there's very little nourishment in it."

"Right you are," admitted Frank. "I hope they'll do a good long stretch for it. Talking of money, it's time I was making a little of it myself. I've been living on dad long enough."

"What line are you thinking of following?" asked Ted.

"Lumbering, I think," returned Frank. "I know more about that than I do anything else and there's plenty of money in it. Dad's made a fortune at it. I'm going shortly to look over some lumber tracts that have been brought to my attention and may be a good investment.

"By the way," he added, as a thought struck him, "these tracts that I have in mind are somewhere on your route. What would be the mat-

ter with my making a trip with you in your plane to look them over?"

"Nothing in the world," responded Ted. "There's plenty of room in this biplane that I'm handling. It was made to hold two persons. Come right along. That is, if your dad is willing. He's my boss, you know."

"Oh, I know he won't object," replied Frank, "but to make sure we'll ask him in the morning. Gee, but that will be an experience! I've never been up in a plane, though I've often wanted to. And with the best aviator in the country as a pilot! I'm sure in luck!"

Maxwell Bruin made no objection when spoken to about the matter the next morning at breakfast. Frank could combine business and pleasure. And his father was glad to do anything that would foster and strengthen his son's friendship with Ted Scott whom he admired more than any young man he had ever seen.

"I'll go to-day, then," cried Frank delightedly.

"You're a fast worker," grinned Ted. "Come along."

"If he doesn't behave himself," joked Mr. Bruin, "drop him somewhere along the route."

"It would be some drop," replied Ted. "Most of the time I'll be flying at a height of fifteen thousand feet."

"Might as well drop that far as fifteen hundred," laughed Frank. "The result would be about the same."

He got ready in haste, and a little later the two young men took off from Lumberport. Ted refrained this time from any stunts, as this was his companion's first experience aloft and he wanted him to get used to straight flying before he indulged in any "fireworks."

They made quick time, but when they reached the Denver flying field they found that there had been no need for haste, for a change had been made in the schedule, so that Ted, instead of starting at night from Denver, would do so early in the morning.

This gave them much of the day to themselves, and Ted proposed that they extend their aerial excursion a little farther, using this time the *Hapworth* for that purpose.

"That'll be fine," acquiesced Frank. "But first I have a little errand to do in Denver, now that I find I have time for it."

He spoke with such elaborate unconcern that Ted's suspicions were aroused.

"All right," he grinned. "Give Miss Wilburton my regards."

Frank got red to the roots of his hair.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"Didn't," laughed Ted. "Just guessed. Good luck, old man!"

"The fact is," admitted Frank, "that I'm not sure of finding her. But I know the friends with whom she stays when she comes to Denver, and I'm just going there on a chance."

"Go to it," counseled Ted. "I'll be rooting for you."

The rooting did little good, for Frank Bruin's face was woebegone when he returned an hour later.

"Nothing doing," he announced lugubriously. "Just missed her. She'd started back for Lumberport by train just half an hour before."

"So near and yet so far," murmured Ted. "Too bad, Frank! But you'll be back in Lumberport yourself in three days."

Three days! They little dreamed how many days would pass before either one of them should see Lumberport again.

## CHAPTER XVI

### Falling From the Skies

"It's worrited Oi be this marnin', Mister Scott," said Jerry Monahan, the watchman in charge of the air field at night, as he came hobbling up to Ted the next morning, while the latter was supervising the loading of mail bags in his plane."

"What about, Jerry?" asked Ted, pausing for a moment as he looked at the old man pleasantly.

"On account of a shadder like," replied Jerry perplexedly.

"A shadow, do you mean?" asked Ted, in bewilderment. "What are you trying to get at Jerry? Been seeing things?"

"Oi know it don't make sense," admitted Jerry. "But that's what Oi did seem to be seein' last noight, a movin' in an' out among the planes—a shadder. It was here an' there, an' me after it as fast as Oi could go wid me rumatiz as bad as it is, an' niver ketchin' up with it."

"Just one of the pilots or mechanics, I suppose, doing a bit of work on a plane," observed Ted, bending once more to his work.

"But why shouldn't it be makin' a bit of a noise, thin?" asked Jerry. "An' why should it be hidin' whin Oi got near it so that me old eyes couldn't see hide nor hair of it. It fair give me the creeps, so it did."

Ted's private idea was that Jerry had in some manner secured some bootleg liquor and had been taking a drop too much.

"Nothing missing this morning, was there?" he asked.

"Nothin' that Oi could notice," returned Jerry. "But Oi jist thought Oi'd tell ye about it, 'cause it wuz heavy on me mind. I don't like nothin' that Oi can't get the rights of, an' it's been a worritin' of me. Ye don't think, sorr, it could have been a sperrit, sorr, do yez?"

"Nothing but flesh and blood, if it was anything at all," Ted assured him. "A sneak thief, maybe, hoping to swipe something from a plane. I'll look over mine now to see if anything is missing."

He did so thoroughly, but found everything in place. A little shred of cloth, caught in a strut, attracted his attention, but it had no apparent significance and he crumpled it up in his hand and dropped it into the jacket of his coat. Just then Frank Bruin came up with a hilarious

greeting, and the thing slipped from his mind.

The loading was soon completed, and then, after seeing that Frank was securely strapped in his seat, Ted stepped in himself and, with the motor roaring, gave the signal for the blocks to be knocked away. The plane whizzed down the runway, Ted lifted it into the air, and the journey was begun—a journey far more momentous than Ted had any conception of at the time.

The weather was all that could be desired, the air was balmy, the sun was shining. The trip could not have been begun under more propitious conditions, as far as any one could see.

Why was it then that Ted was not his usual buoyant self? Nine times out of ten his heart would have been singing. But there was no music in him this morning. He was conscious of a vague unease, a curious sense of depression.

Had it been possible, he would have been glad to enter into conversation with Frank, so as to throw the incubus off his mind. But the roar of the motor made conversation difficult.

Frank himself was having the time of his life. This was evident from his flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. He was fairly brimming with animation.

Indeed, the scene that was spread out before

and below them was one that might stir to enthusiasm the senses of the most sluggish and inert. For spring was in the air, making it tonic, and spring was in the trees, stirring up the sap, and spring was in the earth, clothing it with verdure of tender green.

Green as far as the eye could reach, except where the black rocks of the mountain peaks thrust themselves up menacingly as though disdaining all the softening influences of spring.

Ted felt a touch on his arm. He turned toward Frank, and saw that the latter was pointing to some broad wooded tracts over which they were passing.

It had been understood before they started that Frank would give such a signal when they came to the lumber tracts that he had in mind as a possible purchase.

So Ted turned the nose of the plane downward, and when they had reached a height of about five hundred feet sailed over the broad plateau that contained the thickly wooded tracts in question. He circled the district several times, while Frank, with a pair of field-glasses at his eyes, formed partial estimates of their character and value.

If it had been possible, Ted would have landed and let Frank pursue some of his researches on foot, but, though he searched the plateau with the eyes of a hawk, no possible

place suitable for a landing presented itself.

Perhaps an hour was spent on this scouting trip, and then Frank indicated that he was satisfied for the present. Later on, it was his intention to come on foot or horseback and make an exhaustive study of the tracts.

It was with a feeling of relief that Ted turned the nose of the plane upward, for he had been uneasy at flying on so low a level in that district studded with cliffs. Ten thousand or fifteen thousand feet suited him much better. There was less chance of collision with a precipice, and then, too, in case of the engine going dead or some other disaster to the plane, they would have a chance to use their parachutes.

The plane started upward as Ted directed it, but instead of darting up like an arrow as he had expected, it moved with a more or less labored motion. There was not the usual clean cut cleaving of the air, but a rather reluctant and wobbly movement for which there was no apparent reason, as the motor was working with its usual power.

Something was wrong with the plane! What was it?

Ted's eyes darted like lightning all over the machine to discover the cause of the trouble. He noted a couple of stays that, instead of standing taut and erect, were visibly drooping.

He set the control so that the plane would

keep on a level keel, and jumped for the weakened stays with an idea of reinforcing them before they yielded.

But before he could reach them there were two successive reports like pistol shots. The stays snapped and one of the wings sagged down heavily.

The plane, thrown out of equilibrium, began to flop around wildly like a wounded bird as Ted with a bound regained his seat and seized the controls.

But now the wing on one side was giving way entirely. The plane was doomed!

They were driving straight for a high pinnacle of rocks ahead. Ted made a desperate effort to give the wounded plane sufficient altitude to clear the jagged tops, with the hope that on the other side some place would be revealed that would allow a landing.

But this time the plane refused to obey its helmsman.

Crash!

The plane struck a rock near the top and one side crumpled up like so much paper!

## CHAPTER XVII

### At Grips with Death

Had the biplane struck the rocks squarely, it would have been smashed to bits, together with its inmates.

As it was, the shock that had shorn away the side of the plane tore Ted and Frank from their seats, burst the straps that held them, and hurled them violently against the side of the cockpit.

Ted kept his head and shut off the motor, hoping against hope that there might be some chance of volplaning to a landing below.

But it was too late. The shattered plane could not be guided. With one side gone it whirled wildly about for a moment and then began to fall swiftly into the abyss.

Ted turned toward Frank just in time to see the latter jump.

But before he could follow his friend's example there was a tremendous crash, a sense of shock, the glinting of a thousand stars before

his eyes, and for a space Ted Scott knew no more!

When, after a lapse of time that seemed to be ages but was really only a few minutes, Ted opened his eyes, he found himself wedged tightly among the branches of a big tree.

He was sore and bruised and ached from head to foot. His head was dizzy and whirling, and it took him some time to realize what had happened.

Then it came to him—the sagging wing, the beetling crags, the terrific shock, and finally that fall through the vast expanse of the air!

A smell of something burning assailed his nostrils. He struggled to a sitting position in the fork of the tree, and saw at a little distance the remnants of the shattered plane that had caught fire and were burning briskly.

It was only then that Ted realized his luck.

The plane had struck the ground with nothing to break its fall, and if he had been in it, he could not have escaped death. But, in falling, it had hurled Ted out like a stone from a sling, and, fortunately, he had come down in the branches of the tree, which, while they had torn and scratched him sorely, had at least saved his life.

A pang shot through Ted's heart as he thought of Frank Bruin. Had his friend es-

caped when he made that hurried jump? Or had he been too near the mountain slope to give the parachutes time to open before he landed?

Ted had hard work getting free of the branches, for they had torn and held his clothes in a dozen places, but he finally loosened their clutches and slid painfully to the ground. But in that descent he discovered one thing that was balm to his bruises. No bones were broken!

He hobbled over painfully to the airplane, a considerable portion of which had been consumed. He must save the mail bags!

That was the religion of his class. At all costs, the mail must be saved. If life were lost while doing it, that was hard luck for the aviator.

Some of the bags were already smoldering, and Ted dragged them away and stamped out the sparks and the charred and smoking shreds of bagging. He worked frantically, for every second was precious.

The plane began to feel like a furnace. At ten feet away he could feel his skin blistering. But into the flames he dashed again and again, and each time he carried back one of the precious bags.

The heat was torment, but Ted Scott persisted until every bag had been rescued and dragged to a place out of reach of the flames.

Ted had not the least idea of where he was.

His last glimpse from above had been of those frowning peaks and a deep and desolate appearing valley that seemed to be wholly destitute of any sign of human habitation.

But now his instruments, including the precious compass, which would have been worth its weight in gold in the present emergency, were all being destroyed in the fierce flames that wrapped the plane and destroyed its contents.

He looked up at the peaks, towering many thousands of feet above his head. In places the cliffs were almost straight up and down and seemed to bid defiance to any attempt to scale them. It would be a work of days, perhaps, to reach their tops in the effort to escape from the valley that held him prisoner. Even should he reach the peaks, it might be only to discover equally uninhabited valleys on the other side.

But these were matters that he dismissed from his mind for the moment. Plenty of time to think of them later on. The one thing that mattered now was to find Frank Bruin.

Where would he find him? How would he find him? He almost dreaded to make the search for fear of what that search might reveal.

If it should reveal only his battered and lifeless body, how could he, Ted Scott, take the story to Maxwell Bruin?

But resolutely quelling his misgivings, he

started out, going in the direction where, as nearly as he could figure, Frank should have struck, following his jump from the falling plane.

For a long time he searched in vain. He depended as much on his voice as his eyes, and at every few steps kept calling Frank's name. But there was no answer except the echo of his own voice. He had covered a large extent of territory and had shouted himself hoarse before he finally discovered something that sent a thrill of hope through his veins.

It was a strip of white cloth hanging from the branch of a tree. Ted knew it at once as part of a parachute.

He rushed toward the spot, shouting as he went, and as he neared it he heard a groan.

There on the ground lay Frank in a welter of broken branches and the remains of his parachutes, two of which had been strapped to his back when he entered the plane.

He was lying on his back with his eyes closed. There was a trickle of blood from a gash near his temple and on the back of his head was a lump as big as an egg. His face, except where the blood had smeared it, was as white as ashes.

There was no stream near by, but Ted had water in a canteen strapped to his waist. Part of the water he forced through Frank's lips

and with more of it he bathed his face and wrists.

A hasty going over of Frank's body with his hands told Ted that there were no bones broken. Inspired by this discovery, he renewed his efforts to restore consciousness, and in a few minutes he was rewarded by Frank's opening his eyes.

But they were unseeing eyes at first, and closed again without any sign of recognition.

"Frank! Frank!" cried Ted, trying to rouse him from the torpor that held him. "Wake up, old boy! Come out of it! Get a grip on yourself! It's Ted talking."

The call seemed to bring Frank back from a long journey, and this time there was intelligence in the eyes that opened and fastened themselves on Ted.

"What's the game?" asked Frank feebly. "What are you yelling about? What's the matter with me? What am I lying here for?"

"You won't be lying here long now, thanks be!" replied Ted, overjoyed at the sound of his friend's voice, the voice that he had feared he would never hear again. "You've had a bad fall, Frank—or rather, a jump that ended in a fall. The plane smashed. Don't you remember?"

"Yes," returned Frank, still a little dreamily, "I remember jumping. But I must have been

too near the ground or else the 'chutes didn't open right, for I struck a tree hard, came smashing down through the branches, and landed with a thump. That's all I remember. How about yourself? You were luckier?"

"Not much," replied Ted. "Except, I stayed in the tree and you came right through to the ground. I'm black and blue all over, but that let's me out."

"I guess we've no kick coming," murmured Frank. "We're in great luck to be alive at all."

"Right you are!" agreed Ted. "And I've saved the mail bags from the plane. That's another bit of luck."

Frank struggled to a sitting position as a thought struck him.

"How about the rifle I put in the plane this morning on the chance that I might get a shot at something?" he asked eagerly.

"I'm afraid it's gone with most of the rest of the things," replied Ted. "I didn't see anything of it when I was hauling out the mail bags. And the plane was a roaring furnace when I left it."

"Too bad!" observed Frank regretfully. "It was the finest rifle I had in my collection. I killed a grizzly with it once."

"I'm afraid it's a goner," declared Ted. "Of course, there is a chance that it might have

been thrown from the plane when falling. But if it was, there wouldn't be one chance in a hundred of finding it in these dense woods. It would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. But come now, old fellow, do you think you can get up on your feet?"

"I guess so," replied Frank, and with Ted's assistance he made the effort. "But this old bean of mine is sure groggy," he added. "It's going around like a top."

"Same as mine was a little while ago," said Ted. "But you'll be getting steadier by the minute now. I'll get you over to where I left the mail bags. I want to put them in some safe spot, and when I've done that we'll begin figuring on some way of getting out of here."

"Where are we, anyway?" asked Frank.

"Don't ask me," replied Ted. "We're lost in the wilderness!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Lost in the Rockies

"Nothing very definite in that," was Frank's response to Ted's declaration.

"If it were definite, we wouldn't be lost," replied Ted dryly. "We'll just have to figure things out as we go along. We haven't even a compass to guide us. We'll have to depend on the sun by day and the stars by night. The big thing is that our arms and legs are all here. Gee, I hate to think of what would happen if one of us had a broken leg!"

"We'd sure be up against it," agreed Frank. "They say that nothing ever happens that might not have been worse, and I guess we're one more proof of it. But I sure would like—Jerusalem, look at that!"

As he spoke, he ran toward a bright-looking object that had caught in two low-lying tree branches and borne them down by its weight so that they were within easy reach.

"My rifle, by ginger!" jubilated Frank, as he patted it caressingly. "I'd rather have that in

my hand this minute than ten thousand dollars."

"It'll probably do more for us than the money would just now," agreed Ted, almost as much elated as his friend. "It must have been pitched out just before the plane landed. Doesn't seem to be hurt, does it?"

"Not in the least," replied Frank. "The branches broke the fall. A few scratches on the stock, but there's nothing that's bent or twisted. Gee, but I'm glad to have the feel of it in my hand again!"

"Any other weapons?" asked Ted.

"Not a thing," replied Frank. "I did have a revolver in that bag of mine," he added, looking ruefully at the blazing plane. "But it's done for now. How are you fixed yourself?"

"An automatic revolver," replied Ted drawing the weapon from his pocket, "and a pretty big knife here in my belt. That sums up my arsenal."

"Not so bad, at that," affirmed Frank. Luckily, I put my cartridge belt around my waist before we started, and it's pretty well filled up. Guess we won't starve to death if there's any game at all in this neck of the woods."

"That's just it," replied Ted. "I don't think there's much small stuff that's good for

eating. What game there is is probably of the kind that would hunt us instead of permitting us to hunt them."

"Bears and panthers, I suppose you mean," said Frank. "Shouldn't wonder if we should run across some of them. Not that I'm anxious to, with just one rifle in the outfit. A revolver wouldn't be much good against those fellows unless at a closer range than I'd care to get."

By this time the fire had nearly burned itself out. But it had made a complete wreck of the plane, for everything but the metal work was practically consumed.

"Glad you saved the mail bags," remarked Frank, as he noted the pile of them that Ted had made at a safe distance from the fire.

"Yes," replied Ted, "that's the thing that counts. But we can't stay to guard them, and we've got to devise some means by which they can be found after we get back to civilization again."

This was easier to talk about than to do. In that thickly wooded place one location was very like another. If he had had his instruments, Ted would have been able to mark the spot with a tolerable degree of accuracy.

He solved the problem, or rather made it easier, by taking observations of three peaks that reared themselves into the air, noting their

shape and peculiarities and drawing a rough map of their relation to the place he had chosen for the bags.

This was a rocky spot on the mountain side that was less thickly wooded than elsewhere. He and Frank gathered stones with which they covered the bags so that they would not be discovered and pawed over, perhaps torn into shreds, by prowling animals.

There was danger also that parties of hunters and trappers, if there were any such in this desolate region, might come across the bags and be tempted to loot them. For one of the bags was of registered mail and no doubt contained many thousands of dollars.

For a moment Ted was tempted to try to take this bag along with them. But it was as heavy as either one of them could lift, and Ted's sober second thought told him that the one thing that confronted them just then was the saving of their lives. It would be hard enough to do that, perhaps, traveling light. He did not delude himself. He knew that more than one party of adventurers had left their bones in the Rockies after wandering around and around seeking an egress until at last fever and exhaustion, perhaps starvation, claimed them.

At that very moment their stomachs were clamoring for food. They had brought some

with them in the plane, but every scrap of that had been consumed in the flames.

"Gee, but I'm hungry!" observed Frank.

"Same here," admitted Ted. "Suppose we ring for the waiter and tell him to hurry up that grub."

They laughed, but rather lugubriously.

"How in thunder did this thing happen?" asked Frank. "Dad was priding himself on the strength and stability of his planes. All the old ones used by the Government had been thoroughly overhauled, and he'd bought a number of new ones, the best he could find on the market."

"The plane seemed all right when I examined it this morning," said Ted thoughtfully. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet and slapping his knee with his hand.

"What is it?" asked Frank in surprise.

"Jerry Monahan and his ghost!" cried Ted, pursuing his idea without any regard to Frank's question.

"Come down to earth," counseled Frank. "What have ghosts got to do with us?"

"Nothing. But Jerry has," replied Ted. "Oh, what a fool I was not to pay more attention to the old man this morning!"

In response to Frank's puzzled questions he told him of Jerry's description of events the night before.

"I thought the old fellow had been drinking, and I tried to laugh him out of it," he said. "Of course the ghost idea was nonsense. But what wasn't nonsense was that some one was fooling about the planes. And the one he was especially fooling with was this plane of ours! Some scoundrel deliberately weakened those struts. It was an airman who did it, too!"

"What makes you think that?" asked Frank.

"Because no one else could have done it so cunningly and yet hidden all traces of it," replied Ted.

"Then some one actually tried to kill us!" exclaimed Frank, in horror.

"Tried to kill me," corrected Ted. "Probably had no special grudge against you. Likely enough didn't know that you were going with me. That was just your hard luck."

"Haven't you the least bit of a clue as to who it was?" asked Frank.

"Not the least," returned Ted. "Wait a minute, though," and he pulled from his pocket the shred of cloth he had found near one of the struts that morning.

It was dark material, brown predominating with a dull green stripe.

"Torn from somebody's coat or trousers," he commented. "Pulled away maybe when he heard Jerry pottering along. It may be worth something later on."

"Know anybody that wears that kind of suit?" inquired Frank.

"No, I don't," replied Ted cudgeling his memory. "But just on a chance I'd be willing to make a guess."

"Who?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Can't give you the name now," replied Ted. "It wouldn't be fair. But if I'm right in my suspicion, it's the same man that put the infernal machine in my plane the other day."

"Twice tried to kill you!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, this is horrible, Ted!"

"Horrible is right," agreed Ted. "The worst of it is that I've never given him the slightest reason for his hatred. I simply happen to be in his way and he's trying to get me out of it. Just as simple as that."

"Tell me this," urged Frank. "Is it any one connected with our flying force?"

"I can't even tell you that," replied Ted, "for you might start to guessing and fix your suspicions on somebody that was entirely innocent. Once let me get some definite proof and you'll know mighty quick who it is."

"Here's hoping you get him and that the fellow will get what's coming to him!" exclaimed Frank.

"But to get him we'll first have to find some way out of here," remarked Ted, as he scrutinized the landscape thoroughly.

"In what direction shall we go?" asked Frank. "One way is as good as another, it seems to me. It's all a matter of chance anyway."

"My idea is that we'd better get to the top of this nearest peak and take a squint from there," suggested Ted. "That ought to command an immense sweep of country. If we can catch a glimpse of a settlement, we can set our course for that. Or if we only see a single cabin, it will give us something to steer for."

They set out accordingly to climb the mountain side. It would have been an arduous task under any circumstances, for the grade was steep—in many places almost vertical—and in their shaken and bruised condition the difficulties of the climb were multiplied manifold.

Before an hour had passed they were drenched with perspiration and panting for breath, and the summit of the mountain seemed almost as far above them as when they started.

They were faint, too, from hunger and tormented by thirst. Ted had only a little water left in his canteen, and he had not the least idea when he would be able to replenish his supply.

So they merely moistened their parched lips and tongues with the precious water and kept on doggedly.

Up and up they toiled, at times being forced to make long detours where the steepness of

the ascent forbade a direct climb. Again and again they were tempted to throw themselves down on the ground and rest their aching limbs, but the sinking of the sun in the western sky warned them that the day was waning, and they were desperately anxious to reach the summit before dark had actually settled down upon them.

Reach it at last they did, only to meet with bitter disappointment.

In whatever direction their eager eyes roamed they saw no trace of human habitation. No friendly smoke betrayed the presence of a cabin or a campfire. As far as the eye could reach was nothing but precipitous cliffs and savage gorges that took on an additional air of menace as the dusk settled down upon them.

"Guess we've drawn a blank this time," murmured Frank, as he placed his rifle on a rock and sat down beside it.

"Looks that way," agreed Ted. "But we'll simply have to buck up and make another attempt to-morrow. We'd better look around now for the best place to spend the night."

A little way from where they stood the summit broadened out into a rough plateau with many big rocks scattered around. Dense brushwood bordered the rocky space and many big trees cast their shadows upon it.

Luckily, Ted had some matches, and in a

short time they had gathered enough brushwood to make a fire. The warmth was grateful, for a chill wind had sprung up, and there was a cheer in the crackling flames that went far toward dispelling the foreboding that was natural under the circumstances.

But they could not forget the gnawing hunger that was hourly growing keener.

"They say that he who sleeps dines," remarked Frank, after they had chatted for a while. "Suppose we put it to the test."

"Poor substitute for a regular meal," replied Ted, "but I guess we can't do anything better. Besides, we want to be stirring at the first break of dawn."

They made rough beds of brush and branches in the lee of some big rocks and lay down within a few feet of each other. They were both so exhausted by the strain and toil of the day that they fell asleep almost instantly.

A few hours later Ted Scott sat up with a jerk.

Something had startled him. What was it?

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Midnight Prowler

For a moment Ted Scott had difficulty in remembering where he was. Then it came to him.

Something came to his ears at the same time, something like that which had roused him from slumber.

A rustling, faint at first, but ever growing more distinct, until it resolved itself into the sound of some heavy body pushing itself through the brushwood. Presently it seemed to Ted that he could detect a padding as of feet steadily drawing nearer.

The fire had died down until it was little more than a mass of smoking embers. It cast but a faint gleam of light into the darkness.

But over a distant mountain top the moon had risen, and though it was only in the first quarter it sent some glimmers of silvery radiance into the woods that bordered the rocky plateau on which the wanderers had taken their quarters for the night.

Silently as a shadow, Ted rose and tiptoed over to where Frank was lying.

With one hand Ted tapped Frank on the shoulder and with the other covered his mouth to prevent any sudden expression of alarm.

Frank started up, but grasped the need for silence on the instant.

Ted removed his hand and Frank whispered: "What is it?"

"Don't know yet," replied Ted, also in a whisper. "But it's either a man or an animal of some kind that's making its way through the bushes. Get your rifle ready."

In a twinkling Frank was on his feet with his rifle in his hand.

Each chose a rock within a few feet of each other and, sheltered behind these, they waited with fast beating hearts for some glimpse of the midnight visitor.

One thing speedily became certain. Their strained ears told them that it was no man approaching the camp. The crashing through the bushes was produced by a heavier body than any human possessed. At intervals they caught a grunt that was clearly that of an animal.

For a few minutes that seemed intolerably long they waited. Then, in the dim moonlight, they saw a monstrous mass take shape behind the fringe of bushes, and a moment later a

huge grizzly bear lumbered into the clearing!

Ted Scott had never seen a grizzly, and he was appalled at its tremendous size. It seemed more like a gorilla in the mighty power of its paws, armed with formidable claws.

The head was thrust forward, and under the shaggy brows Ted could see the fire that glowered in the malignant eyes.

The beast came slowly forward with a rolling gait, darting quick glances from side to side. Inadvertently, one foot stepped on a smouldering ember, and with a gesture of rage from the pain the bear scattered the remnants of the fire with one sweep of its paw.

Then it squatted on its haunches and sniffed the air. Unluckily for Ted and Frank, the wind was toward the bear and carried their scent to it.

They could see the fur stiffen on the huge body. A growl proceeded from its cavernous throat. Then it advanced menacingly toward the rocks that sheltered its enemies.

Crack! Bang!

Frank's rifle and Ted's revolver spoke at the same instant.

But the light was poor and the position from which they had to shoot was awkward. The bear gave a tremendous roar, and his momentary wavering showed that one or both bullets had found a mark in his huge body.

But the wounds only served to infuriate him, and he plunged forward with ferocity redoubled. One sweep of his paw struck Frank's rifle from his hand just as he was about to fire again, and the bear rose on his hind legs to gather Frank into his deadly embrace.

But just then Ted fired again and the bullet ploughed through the animal's shoulder.

With a frightful growl the brute turned toward Ted. Once more Ted fired, but without checking the bear's advance, and the next instant the brute was upon him.

Like a flash Ted Scott turned and ran for his life!

He plunged into the bushes with the bear close upon his heels, so close that Ted could feel its hot breath upon his neck.

Stumbling, dodging, twisting, Ted ran as in a nightmare. There was no trail that he could follow. Roots reached out to trip him. Creepers from the trees threatened to wind about his neck. Behind him came the angered brute, panting and growling, moving with a velocity unbelievable in an animal of that size and apparent awkwardness.

Frank in the meantime had regained his rifle, and was following both pursuer and pursued, frantic to get in a shot that might put an end to the chase. But the bear and Ted were so close together that Frank, had he fired,

was quite as likely to hit the one as the other.

On a straight stretch Ted would inevitably have been caught. But he kept his head and availed himself of every rock and tree to halt and bewilder his clumsy pursuer. Before the latter could bring himself up and double on his tracks, Ted had gained a new lead of ten or a dozen feet.

But he seemed only to be postponing his fate. He was tiring more rapidly than his opponent. His head was reeling, his lungs seemed to be bursting.

He had been able to get in one more shot from his rapidly emptying weapon, but on trying for still another the revolver was wrenched out of his hand by an intervening branch, and if Ted had stooped to pick it up, his enemy would have been upon him.

Bang!

Once more Frank's rifle spoke, and into Ted's heart leaped a gleam of hope.

But it was transitory, for, although the beast had quivered from the shock, the bullet had evidently not reached a vital spot, and it still kept on.

Ted was at the last gasp. His enemy was not more than six feet behind him, and he expected every instant to be swept into the bear's embrace.

He knew what would follow. The bear would

hug him closely with his forepaws, raise one of his terrible hind legs and tear him open from throat to waist.

Ted felt for his knife. It could not help him much, but at least he could die fighting.

Just then his hand closed on something he had forgotten he had.

It was a Very pistol, one of those contrivances that all airmen carry with which to shoot green and red flares that serve to attract attention and signal for help in an emergency. It was more like a glorified Roman candle than anything else, but the flares were extremely bright and dazzling.

It was a desperate chance, but Ted seized it.

Pulling the Very from his belt, he turned and discharged it full in the face of the bear!

## CHAPTER XX

### Over the Cliff

The effect of Ted's stratagem was instantaneous.

The dazzling flare struck full in the eyes of the grizzly bear, and for a moment blinded it.

The astonished brute halted abruptly in its tracks, pawing at its eyes that were full of the stinging particles of powder.

That brilliant, blinding light not only disconcerted the bear, but saved Ted from an awful death in another form.

As the light flared up, Ted saw that a few feet beyond him in the direction he had been running was the brink of a precipice. A few strides more and he would have been over the brink.

The revelation made him gasp. But it also brought with it a plan that might save him from the bear.

The latter had now partly recovered from its fright, and with fearful growls and slavering jaws once more rushed at Ted.

Ted ran straight ahead until he was within ten feet of the brink, the grizzly after him in hot pursuit.

Then Ted swerved suddenly to the right, at the same time discharging another flare from his Very pistol.

The sudden glare dazzled the eyes of his pursuer so that it did not see the fate toward which it was rushing.

Its headlong charge carried it to the very brink of the precipice. Too late, it realized its danger and tried to throw itself back on its haunches.

But the momentum was too great. For a moment it reeled on the edge of the cliff, digging in desperately with its claws. The next, with a tremendous roar, it toppled over the edge!

Down, down it went for at least a thousand feet, turning over and over in the air. Then came an awful thud—and silence!

Ted sat down suddenly on the ground, shaking in every limb. That terrific race for life had taxed his strength and vitality to the utmost.

Frank came rushing up to him.

"Are you hurt, Ted?" he cried. "Did he claw you?"

"Didn't quite get to me," gasped Ted, "although one of his sweeps tore my jacket. Gee, but that was a close call!"

"I'll tell the world it was," agreed Frank. "You'll never be nearer death than you've been for these last minutes. My heart was in my mouth. I caught him once with a bullet, but it didn't stop him."

"Those fellows are hard to kill," replied Ted. "But what we couldn't do the cliff did. He's dead now, all right."

"No doubt of that," returned Frank. "But we mustn't forget that those brutes often travel in pairs, and the mate of this one may be near at hand. Let's get back to the rocks and pile them up in a kind of fortification."

"Good idea," affirmed Ted, rising to his feet. "Although I fancy that if another one had been near by it would have put in an appearance by this time. That awful rumpus could have been heard a good way off."

"His nibs was certainly peevish, and he was willing to let the whole world know it," agreed Frank. "You did some rattling work, boy, when you pulled that Very pistol. How did you come to think of it?"

"Just luck," confessed Ted. "I was feeling for my knife and my hand touched the pistol. It was the counsel of desperation, but I knew the knife wouldn't do any good and I thought the pistol might."

"Quick thinking!" exclaimed Frank in admiration. "Gee, Ted, that head of yours is

always on the job. And the leading of the bear to the precipice and blinding him at just the right moment so that he couldn't see where he was going! You weren't behind the door, Ted, when brains were given out."

They made their way back to their first rendezvous, and there they gathered together as many big stones as they could until they had constructed a kind of fort that was reasonably strong and at least would give them ample time to pump bullets into any other invader that might come their way.

Having done this, they went together over the ground that had been followed in the mad chase until they found Ted's revolver. They loaded this fully, as well as the rifle, and then for the first time were able to draw breath and relax.

But sleep had been banished from their eyes for the rest of that night. They gathered more brushwood and replenished the fire until it was burning fiercely. The cheerful light helped conquer the gloom of the night and also assisted in raising their spirits, which surely stood in great need of something in the form of a tonic.

"Another advantage this will have," commented Ted, as he threw fresh fuel into the flames, "is that it may possibly attract the attention of any party there may be in these

wilds and cause them to investigate. We'll do this every night after this."

"Sure thing," assented Frank. "I hope, though, there won't be many nights when it will be necessary."

"Hard to tell," replied Ted soberly. "We may be here for weeks before we run across anybody or they run across us."

"Of course," said Frank thoughtfully, "when we don't turn up at the end of your route our people will know that something has happened and will send out parties in search of us. Dad will move heaven and earth to find us, and when dad starts to do a thing he doesn't do it by halves."

"I know that," replied Ted. "But we're in a district now that covers more territory than many a kingdom of Europe. There are thousands of square miles here that have probably never been trodden by a human foot. But are we downhearted? We are not. Some way or other we'll find a way out of this tangle."

"If we only had something to eat," murmured Frank. "I'm as empty as a vacuum."

"We may have to tighten our belts a good many times," admitted Ted. "Gee, if we'd only been lucky enough to kill that grizzly with a bullet! At this very minute we might have a luscious bear steak sizzling over the fire."

"Don't talk that way unless you want to drive me crazy," pleaded Frank. "Don't you think," he added, as a thought struck him, "that we may find the body of the bear in the morning?"

"Possibly," conceded Ted. "If we do, our food troubles will be over. We'll make a careful search, anyway. If we find it, we can cure a lot of the meat and take it along with us."

But that hope grew slimmer when the morning came and they looked over the side of the cliff. It was a frightful precipice and went down sheer for what seemed thousands of feet, so that they could barely see objects at the bottom. Although they knew that the bear must be there they could detect no trace of it.

Ted shuddered as he remembered how near he himself had been to going over the brink.

"Nothing doing there, I guess," said Frank, as he drew back regretfully from the edge of the precipice.

"No," agreed Ted. "It would take us all day to get down there, even if we were able to find a roundabout route that led to it, and long before that the body of the bear would have been stripped to the bone. Look!"

He pointed high in the air to a speck that grew larger and larger until it resolved itself into a buzzard. As they watched, other specks appeared and followed the first.

The great birds swept around in ever narrowing circles until their scent located the bear at the bottom of the gorge. Then they descended swiftly until they were lost to sight below.

"There's the answer," observed Ted. "We've furnished a feast for the buzzards. In half an hour from now there'll be no more of that bear except the bones."

It was a gruesome sight, and in the mind of each, though they carefully refrained from expressing it, came the thought that some day before long the buzzards might again be called to a banquet in which they themselves would figure.

They dismissed the disturbing thought and set themselves resolutely to the problem that confronted them. But before addressing themselves to the task they each took a sip of the precious water that remained in the canteen.

The sun rose brightly and furnished them a guide by which they could distinguish the cardinal points. But in their utter lack of knowledge as to where they were it did them little good to know which was east, west, north or south. Whatever direction they chose was just as likely to bring them to some human habitation or furnish egress from the mountains as any other.

Still, to prevent wandering in a circle, they elected to pursue a general course toward the

northwest and they kept to that as far as the topography of the region permitted.

As the sun rose higher, their torment from thirst increased. At intervals of two hours they applied their lips to the canteen, not swallowing any of the contents, but simply cooling their parched mouths and tongues.

On they went and on, casting avid glances to right and left in the hope of discovering game of some kind. But the region seemed to be absolutely deserted by animals as well as men. Even a squirrel would have been welcomed as a boon from heaven. But no living thing appeared, and their hopes sank lower as their frames became weaker.

From time to time they cast glances at the sky in the hope of discovering an airplane. It was a scant possibility, for none regularly covered that route except the one that now lay a heap of débris and ashes. Even if one had appeared in the sky, the chances were a hundred to one that the pilot would not descry the two figures, tiny as ants from a great height.

By noon they were gasping from their exertions. They had covered many miles, but mostly up one mountain side and down another so that, measuring space as the crow flies, they were not very far from where they had started.

"I've got to rest for a while, or I'll drop,"

muttered Frank at last, throwing himself down under the shade of a tree.

"Same here," replied Ted, following his example. "We'll give ourselves an hour and then we'll start on again."

Hunger was gnawing at their vitals. Their pulses were already beginning to beat faster with fever. Lines were forming about their mouths, and their eyes, preternaturally bright, looked out from haggard faces. The thought of food, food of any kind, was becoming an obsession. For a single slice of bread they would have given everything they had in the world.

They were too tired and depressed to talk. Frank lay, supported by one elbow, a prey to gloomy thoughts. Between him and Ted, but nearer to the latter, lay the rifle.

Ted drew in his gaze from the distant horizon and turned to say something to Frank.

What he was about to say died on his lips! He had seen something that chilled him with horror! He could fairly feel the hair rising on his head!

## CHAPTER XXI

### The Rattler

A few feet from where Frank Bruin was lying and almost behind him, was a mass of something that looked like a coil of mildewed rope. Ted had noted it carelessly before, but had paid no attention to it.

Now *that rope was moving.*

Before Ted Scott's fascinated gaze the mass heaved and billowed. Then a triangular head appeared, in which glowed two little eyes like sparks of fire.

"Don't move, Frank! Don't stir!" murmured Ted in a tense, low voice.

There was the faintest shadow of a movement, instantly suppressed. It spoke volumes for Frank's nerve that he became instantly as rigid as marble.

"I'm going to shoot," murmured Ted. "But whatever I do, don't move a muscle."

Ted's hand stole silently toward the rifle. He grasped it and, inch by inch, so slowly that

the weapon seemed to be drifting, raised it to his shoulder.

Frank's eyes were following him. Perspiration was pouring down his face. He knew that he was in mortal danger of some kind, but could not tell what kind. Yet he remained like granite.

Now, for the first time, the head seemed to discern something queer in the recumbent body so close to it. Instantly all sleepiness left the reptile. Like lightning it threw itself into a coil, sprang its rattle and raised its head to strike.

At that instant the rifle spoke!

The bullet shattered the head of the reptile.

With the crack of the rifle Frank leaped to his feet. As he turned and saw the floundering of the hideous coils he realized for the first time what manner of death had threatened him.

"Gee, Ted!" he exclaimed and his voice was shaky. "That was a dandy shot. You saved my life for fair."

"You helped save it yourself by keeping your nerve and staying perfectly still," replied Ted. "One little movement on your part and his fangs would have been in you."

He threw down the rifle and, standing beside Frank, he watched with a shudder the mad thrashings of the sinewy coils that continued

for some time before they ceased altogether.

"He's an immense fellow, too!" exclaimed Frank. "Five feet, if he's an inch!"

"Ten rattles," counted Ted. "A regular old veteran and chock full of poison. We'll have to keep our eyes open, if there are many of that kind around."

"Lucky I didn't lie down on him in the first place," observed Frank. "I might have done it just as well as not."

They reconnoitred the surrounding patch of woodland thoroughly, but discovered no more rattlers. Then they sat down on a rock and studied once more their dead enemy.

A silence fell between them. Each seemed to be thinking of something he did not care to speak of to the other. They cast furtive glances at the body of the snake and then looked away quickly.

Frank threw an oblique look at Ted and found that Ted was looking at him in the same way. Their eyes met and held for a moment. Then Ted burst into laughter.

"Out with it!" he shouted at Frank. "I know just what you're thinking and are afraid to say."

"I'll bet you're tarred with the same brush," Frank defended himself a little sheepishly.

"Sure I am," confessed Ted. "We're both starving, and we're thinking how good a slice

of that snake would taste. Come now, 'fess up."

"Guilty," admitted Frank, with a grin. "It goes against me like the mischief to eat snake, but I'd rather do it than starve to death."

"The Indians do it and think it's a delicacy," declared Ted. "Say it tastes very much like eels. We can't afford to be too squeamish when it's a matter of life and death. Here's the only food we've seen for two days, and there's no use of our committing suicide. What do you say?"

For answer Frank drew his knife from his belt.

"You go ahead and build a fire while I cut up a few steaks," he said. "We can shut our eyes while we eat, and perhaps we can get it down."

In a few minutes a fire was burning briskly. It was with a feeling of repugnance that they held bits of the snake over the blaze to roast them. But to their famished nostrils the smell was most enticing and their scruples vanished.

They tasted the meat gingerly at first, but a moment later were tearing at it ravenously. To their surprise and delight it could hardly be distinguished from eel. As they ate, they could feel new life and strength come creeping back into their veins.

When at last they had eaten, not all they

wanted, but all they dared in their weakened condition, they rounded up their meal with a sip of water from the canteen and looked at each other with new hope dawning in their eyes.

"One more prejudice gone to smash," observed Frank. "Snake meat for mine after this, whenever I can get it."

"I don't imagine it will ever be especially popular as an article of diet, but it sure came in as a life saver this time," replied Ted. "Beggars can't be choosers. But it tasted all right, at that—so good, in fact, that we'd better cut up and roast the rest of his snakeship and take the meat along with us."

The counsel was too sensible to be disregarded, and they carefully husbanded the edible parts of the snake for future use. Then, with stomachs much fuller and hearts much lighter, they resumed their journey.

All that afternoon they toiled, sometimes in the shadow of the trees, at other times in the full blaze of the sun, without discovering in all those hours one sign of human presence. As far as they could see, the desolate region might have remained that way since the beginning of the world.

Their hunger had been temporarily satisfied, but their thirst hourly became more tormenting. They looked eagerly about for cacti, for

they knew that this curious plant carried its own reservoir of water. But although the plant was abundant on the desert wastes, they came across none of it in this high mountain region.

Finally the reserve they had in the canteen scarcely amounted to a thimbleful apiece. This they kept for the last extremity, no longer daring even to wet their prached lips with it.

Their bodies were like furnaces, their lips cracked and their tongues so dry and swelled that they could hardly speak. They were in veritable torture. How long they could keep this up before becoming a prey to delirium became a momentous question.

Night came at last and found them exhausted. They threw themselves down by the side of a gully that had once been the bed of a stream. Now there was not a drop in it, not even mud from which some drops of water might be squeezed.

But at least they had food, and this satisfied one of their cravings.

"We'll go mad soon if we don't find water," muttered Frank despondently. "I feel as though I were withering up. If any one touched me with a match, I believe I'd light."

In accordance with their decision of the night before, they built a fire in the hope that it might attract attention.

"And I'm going to use my Very pistol," declared Ted. "There's a regular Morse code that signifies distress, a sort of S O S that may bring some one to our help, if they happen to see it."

"Good idea," pronounced Frank.

They carried out their resolve, and alternate green and red lights mounted like rockets into the skies.

"How are you fixed for cartridges?" asked Ted.

"Got about twenty left," replied Frank. "Why?"

"I was thinking it might be a good idea to shoot off a couple of them," replied Ted. "Those who don't see our lights may hear the reports. Of course we don't want to waste any more than we have to, but it might be worth while to take a chance."

The plan appealed to Frank, and two shots echoed through the mountains.

A few minutes later there came what seemed an answering report.

"Somebody's heard us!" cried Frank excitedly. "Did you hear that shot?"

## CHAPTER XXII

### In the Torrent

Ted Scott shook his head at Frank's exclamation.

"Guess again, old man," he said. "That wasn't a shot. It was thunder."

Frank's face fell, but immediately lightened again.

"Just as good!" he cried. "Thunder means rain! Rain means drink!"

"Right you are!" exclaimed Ted, sharing his friend's delight. "Provided it isn't a false alarm. Oh, if the rain only comes!"

"Just like our luck to have the storm pass over," grumbled Frank.

They crouched there with fast-beating hearts, watching the black, heavy clouds that were piling rapidly above them.

The thunder increased in frequency and jagged flashes of lightning shot athwart the sky. The wind soughed through the narrow pass.

"I felt a drop then!" cried Frank exultantly. "There's another! And another!"

"It's coming!" yelled Ted, almost beside himself with joy. "Glory hallelujah!"

Then it came, the blessed rain, the cooling rain, the life-giving rain, in scattering drops at first and then in torrents.

How they reveled in it, holding their parched mouths up to the sky and drinking in the rain like nectar! They drank it in, too, through every pore of their bodies. In a few minutes they were drenched to the skin. They did not dream of seeking shelter. Rain, rain, more rain! They felt that they could never get enough.

It was Ted Scott who first regained his senses enough to sound a note of warning.

"Not too much all at once, Frank," he counseled. "I know you feel as though you could drink a hogshead of it. So do I. But let's go easy—a little at a time until we get used to it."

Frank knew that the counsel was sound, but it was hard to conform to it. But his common sense came to his aid and gave him the mastery over his desires.

For over an hour the two lay in the open, while the water formed about them in pools. It was only when it seemed that the rain would not cease for some time that they began to make preparations for the night.

They filled the canteen with the precious

fluid and only wished that they had more receptacles to hold it. But they knew that in the morning there would be numerous hollows filled with rain, so that on that day at least they could keep the contents of the canteen untouched.

They found a shelter in the cliff formed by overhanging rocks. They wrung the water out of their drenched clothes as well as they could and lay down in them to sleep.

Ordinarily, under such conditions, they would have been profoundly uncomfortable. But they had suffered so terribly from the lack of water that now they were happier in their wet clothes than they would have been in dry ones.

The rain showed no signs of letting up. It came down in torrents, and the beating of it on the rocks that formed their covering was the last sound they heard as they sank into slumber.

The strain and excitement made them sleep more heavily than usual, and some hours later Ted Scott felt as though he were being dragged from an abyss ten thousand fathoms deep up, up to full consciousness.

He resisted the urge with a feeling of resentment and sought again to sink into slumber. But the call was insistent and had in it a growl of menace that grew in volume until it sounded like the roar of Niagara.

Startled, he sprang to his feet. Now he knew

that the roar he heard had not been that of a nightmare.

A howling torrent was tearing along the bed of the gully. The cloudburst higher in the mountain had flung its waters into the cut prepared for them, and now the rushing stream was bank full and racing along at railroad speed.

Already it had overflowed the banks and was lapping at his feet. A moment later it had reached his knees.

Ted rushed to where Frank Bruin was lying on a somewhat higher elevation and shook him violently.

"What's the matter?" muttered Frank drowsily.

"Matter enough!" cried Ted. "Get up! Quick! You'll be drowned if you don't."

Frank, wide awake now, scrambled to his feet.

"It's a freshet!" cried Ted. "It'll catch us in another minute. Quick! We've got to climb."

This was more easily said than done. The gorge in which they found themselves was a narrow one, and the cliff towering over them was almost perpendicular.

Now the water was up to their waists, tearing at them, trying to suck them into the main stream.

They rushed frantically to a spot on the

precipice where some outgrowing shrubs offered a promise of a hand-hold as they tried to scramble upward. But the roots had been loosened by the rain and came away in their grasp.

They tumbled back into the water, which now filled the entire gorge and was almost up to their necks.

Again and again they tried desperately to mount above the surface of the flood.

They could no longer rely on the shrubs, which yielded at a touch. They endeavored to dig into the crevices of the rock with fingers and toes. But the projections were slight and slippery. Their shins were barked, their fingers torn and bleeding, and they were torn away from the rock and hurled into the foaming torrent.

Now they must swim for it, or rather try to keep afloat and avoid the stumps and logs that were carried along with them on the bosom of the torrent.

Where that stream would take them they had no means of knowing. For all they knew, it might sweep them over the brink of a precipice to sure destruction.

They tried as far as they could to keep together, but were soon swept apart and lost sight of each other in the darkness. They shouted, but their voices did not carry above the howling of the torrent.

The situation had resolved itself into a stark struggle for life. Both were expert swimmers, but that availed them little in this seething caldron. They could not shape their course. They were carried along like chips. All they could do was to try to keep their heads above the surface of the water and trust in Providence.

In all that frightful tumult, Ted Scott kept his head. Again and again he averted disaster by dodging and ducking the logs that were swept along by the current, a blow from any one of which might have proved his undoing.

But he was tiring fast, and his breath came in tortured gasps.

A tree, uprooted by the flood, flashed by him, and the extended branches swept Ted into their embrace. He felt as though the folds of a snake were winding themselves about him. He struggled desperately to free himself.

Then something struck him as with a sledge hammer and he struggled no more!

## CHAPTER XXIII

### In Dire Plight

It may have been minutes or hours afterward when Ted Scott again came to himself.

He woke to consciousness to find his body, below the shoulders, swirling in the water. He tried instinctively to press his legs down in an effort to find footing. But they encountered nothing solid and he was forced to desist.

His head ached. His hair was plastered down over his eyes. He tried to raise his hand to brush the hair back, and found that his arms and shoulders were tightly wedged between two rocks.

He tried to reconstruct the scene just before he had lost consciousness. He could remember struggling to free himself from the branches of the tree. Then had come the blow on the head that had made him lose consciousness.

But where was he now? And how had he come to be there?

As his dizzy head cleared somewhat, he was able to establish that he had been driven by the

current into a cul-de-sac formed by two rocks. They had caught his shoulders so as to maintain him in a partly prone position, with his head above water and resting on the side of one of the rocks. It was this lucky chance alone that had saved him from drowning.

His dim eyes looked up at the sky. It had ceased raining, the clouds had vanished, and dawn was just breaking. He decided that he had been in his present position for a long time.

Anguish stabbed his heart as his thoughts reverted to his comrade. What had become of Frank Bruin in that wild night ride on the maddened waters of the torrent?

He worked his right arm to and fro gingerly until he had freed it from its imprisonment. Then, turning on his side, he released the other arm. This removed some of the pressure of the rocks upon his shoulders, and he soon found himself entirely free and clinging with his hands to the rocks that had been his salvation.

He saw that the rocks were at the side of the gully that formed the bed of the stream. The waters had subsided considerably by this time, and were now confined to the banks, leaving a trail at the side clear.

Painfully and slowly, Ted managed to pull himself up and free of the gully. Then he sprawled down on his back on the trail, while he tried to regain his vanished strength.

Gradually life came back into his veins. He worked his arms and legs to see if they obeyed his control, and found to his immense relief that his bones were intact.

He rose and tried to walk. He could only hobble at first, but his indomitable will sustained him and before long he gained the mastery over his aching limbs.

His only thought was to find Frank, alive or dead. And his heart sank as he realized that the latter was the stronger probability.

He did not know whether to look up or down stream. Had Frank succumbed before himself or had he been carried still farther along in the grip of the torrent?

On the chance of the first supposition being true, he retraced the trail upstream until he had come to the place which he recognized as their camp of the night before.

Though he scanned every inch of the stream and the open space at its side, he found no traces of his missing comrade.

With a groan at the time he had lost he turned and went back over the same path he had been following. He was getting stronger now, however, and made better time.

He passed the rocks that had saved him and went on. For at least two miles he pursued his painful journey. At every step he feared he might come in sight of some precipice over

which the stream had poured. That would have sounded the death knell of his hopes.

His heart leaped on turning a bend of the gully, when, at some little distance, he discerned the body of a man stretched out on the bank of the stream.

With a shout, he forced himself into a run, and to his infinite delight saw that the figure moved, raised itself on one elbow, and tried to shout in return. But the voice was weak and failed to carry.

Never mind! Frank was alive! That was all that mattered!

In an instant Ted was at his side and fairly hugging him, while tears of which he was not ashamed ran down his cheeks.

"Frank! Frank!" he cried. "Thank goodness that I've found you! Are you hurt?"

"Somewhat disfigured but still in the ring," replied Frank, with a smile that was shot across with a twinge of pain. "The old stream tossed me here, but I guess it did something to my ankle. I was grieving myself sick, worrying about you and wanting to go in search of you. But when I tried to stand, it was no go. I don't know whether my ankle is broken or just sprained, but at any rate it's out of commission."

Ted ran his hands over the injured member.

"It isn't broken," he pronounced with relief.

"But it's sprained and badly swollen. A few days rest will set it all right."

He drew his comrade up into the bushes, where he made him a comfortable bed of brush and branches. Then he applied himself to the injured ankle, bathing it and rubbing it gently and bandaging it with a strip of cloth that he tore from his shirt.

"Feel better now?" he asked.

"Immensely," answered Frank. "But it's the worst of luck that I should be laid up just now. It was bad enough before you had a cripple on your hands."

"That's all right," replied Ted cheerily. "The big thing is that you're alive. All you've got to do now is to rest and be patient. We'll get along somehow."

"But we have no weapons now unless you've saved your revolver," said Frank. "My rifle was swept away."

"The revolver's gone too," replied Ted. "Ripped out of my belt. But I've still got my knife. You just forget things now and get well. This is my job."

But the "job" of which he spoke so lightly, he knew his heart was a terribly serious one.

The primal requisite was food. They had plenty of water now, so that they need not fear thirst, at least for a time. But they had not a

scrap of anything edible, even the remains of the snake meat having been lost.

There was a possibility of fish in the stream, however, and, with a bent pin for a hook and worms that he dug up for bait, Ted set to work. Though he spent most of the day in the task no fish rose to the bait. Either there were few fish there, or the turbid muddy water prevented their seeing and yielding to the lure.

In one of the eddies of the stream, however, he did find the drowned body of a squirrel, and, repugnant as it was to eat game that had died in such fashion, they were forced to subdue all fastidious scruples. It was at any rate better than starving.

Luck was a little kinder during the next three days and Ted caught a couple of small fish that helped to modify the cravings of hunger. Then came two days more when they had absolutely nothing and were forced to eat leaves and the bark of trees.

On the sixth day they were so wan and haggard that their best friends would not have recognized them.

Weaponless! Foodless! All but hopeless!

## CHAPTER XXIV

### Rescue

The only gleam of light in the situation was that during this passage of time Frank's ankle had so far returned to normal that he was able to bear his weight upon it and hobble along with the help of a stick that served as a cane.

"We'll get out of this to-morrow," declared Frank, on the evening of the sixth day. "Staying here means sure starvation. I'm able to get along now, even if slowly."

"Right you are," responded Ted. "We'll go by easy stages and rest when you have to. My opinion is that we'd better follow the course of this stream. Further on it may empty into some river or lake. At any rate, we'll be sure of water to drink, and our chance of finding help will be as good on this route as on any other."

They started out at dawn the next morning, so as to avoid as much as possible the heat of the day. Their progress was slow, not only be-

cause of Frank's weakened ankle, but because the vitality of both was so reduced as to forbid any kind of speed.

But movement of any kind was better than inaction, and their spirits revived with every mile they traversed.

They noted as they proceeded that the gully widened as though it had at one time formed the bed of a considerable river. That was inspiring, for the chances were that the river had emptied somewhere into a still larger body of water. There was little chance that it would prove to be landlocked.

With frequent stops for Frank to rest, they had kept on until nearly noon, when, just as they were nearing a point where the river bed made a sharp turn to the right, Ted noted a hawk flying low overhead.

"If we only had your rifle now!" he observed to Frank, as he watched the bird hungrily.

"Yes," returned Frank, "it sure is exasperating—What's that?"

The sharp report of a rifle had punctuated the stillness, and at the same moment the hawk halted in its flight and came down near them in a whirling mass of feathers.

"Never mind the hawk," shouted Ted in wild excitement, as Frank stooped to pick it up. "Let's find the man that fired that rifle."

They hurried on to where the river bed

curved, and saw before them a large body of water into which the stream emptied.

Their hearts leaped as they saw near the shore two large canoes that were manned by half a dozen men, one of whom carried a still smoking rifle.

There was a shout of amazement from the voyagers at the sight of the two tatterdemalions coming toward them with wild shouts and frantic gestures.

In a moment the noses of the canoes were turned in toward shore, and the two parties reached the bank almost at the same instant of time.

A tall, swarthy man, who seemed to be the leader and still carried the rifle, leaped ashore and strode toward the newcomers.

As Frank caught sight of him he halted abruptly.

"Come along," urged Ted, putting out his arm to support him. "What are you stopping for?"

"That fellow's Prentice," growled Frank, his face as black as a thunder cloud. "You know —the fellow that cut me out with Bessie Wilburton. I'd rather starve than have him help me."

"Cut that out, Frank, old boy," urged Ted. "Any port in a storm, you know. You can settle your private grudge later."

By this time Prentice had come up to them.

"Hello, strangers!" he greeted them in a big, booming voice. "What brings you up this way? Thought we were all alone in this part of the Rockies."

"That's just what we'd been thinking of ourselves," replied Ted happily. "Gee, but we're glad to meet you! Our airplane dropped and we've been lost in the wilderness and almost starved to death. Haven't eaten anything but leaves and bark for the last two days."

"That's hard luck!" exclaimed Prentice sympathetically. "We've got plenty of grub and will soon fix you up. You certainly look as though you had been up against it," he added, as he scanned their tattered clothes and haggard features.

"Like something the cat dragged in," acquiesced Ted, with a grin. "Here's your hawk," he said, as he took it from Frank's hand. "We were just wishing we could have it to eat when your shot rang out."

"We'll give you better eating than that," laughed Prentice, as he took the trophy. "But now come along, and I'll have the cook fix you up something. By the way, I haven't introduced myself. My name's Prentice. I'm surveying some lumber tracts of mine in this locality."

"Glad to know you," returned Ted, while

Frank kept a stubborn silence. "My name's Ted Scott and my friend——"

He got no further. The name had startled Prentice like an electric shock.

"Not the Ted Scott who flew to Paris?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes," replied Ted. "And my friend here is——"

"Hey, there, you galoots!" roared Prentice to his men. "Come running and meet the man who flew the Atlantic."

The men swarmed from the canoes and up the bank, and again Ted found himself the center of amazed admiration. He bore it good-naturedly for a few moments, and then resumed where Prentice had interrupted him:

"This friend of mine," he said to Prentice, "is Frank Bruin——"

Prentice started back, while Frank looked at him stonily.

"Not Frank Bruin of Lumberport?" he ejaculated.

"The same," replied Ted.

A slow flush spread over Prentice's face. Then he extended his hand. Frank hesitated, then took the outstretched hand stiffly but dropped it immediately.

"And now that grub you were talking about," put in Ted hastily, to end what he feared might be an embarrassing scene.

"Sure enough," replied Prentice, as he gave orders to his men.

An abundant repast was soon placed before the wanderers and it required all their self-control to limit themselves as they knew they ought. No king ever enjoyed his meal as they did that one.

Afterward there was a shower of questions on the part of Prentice and his men, in response to which Ted did all the talking, Frank remaining stubbornly mute.

"Your folks will be crazy about you," remarked Prentice, after he had learned all the facts; "so I'll take you to the nearest railroad point and say good-by to you there, for I'll have to stay in this section some time longer. I'll first send a party out to get your mail bags. The men are familiar with this section and can find them easily from your directions."

He did this, and on the second day the party returned with the precious bags, which were stowed safely in the canoes. Then they set out on their journey, Frank having managed to be taken into the canoe not bearing Prentice and Ted Scott.

"I owe my life to Prentice," Frank explained to Ted; "so I can't quarrel with him. But I can at least keep away from him."

Prentice seemed almost equally embarrassed. Also he acted like a man that had something

on his mind. That evening in the canoe he unburdened himself to Ted.

"Your friend Bruin is good and sore at me," remarked Prentice.

"What makes you think that?" asked Ted, wondering what was coming next.

"I know it," declared Prentice. "He thinks I robbed him of his girl. I won't deny that I wanted to, but—I didn't."

"He heard you were engaged to Miss Wilburton," remarked Ted, keenly on the alert.

"I asked her to marry me," confessed Prentice. "She refused. Then, on the hope that the news would keep Bruin away from her, I spread the report that we were engaged. It wasn't playing the game honorably, and I'm heartily ashamed of it. She heard of what I'd been saying and gave me a scorching dressing down. Told me never to look at her nor speak to her again. Fact is, she's heels over head in love with Bruin, and I never had a chance. There! I've got that off my chest. I want you to tell Bruin the facts as a sort of reparation on my part."

"I will," promised Ted jubilantly.

He proceeded to do this the next day when, after Prentice had landed them, they were on the train for Lumberport. They had made themselves a little more presentable before they had boarded the cars.

"Lucky you had that shave," laughed Ted, "or Bessie wouldn't have known you."

"Bessie!" exclaimed Frank bitterly. "She doesn't want to know me. I'm nothing to her."

"You great, big, monumental idiot!" exploded Ted. "The girl's crazy about you. Heels over head in love with you. Prentice told me so."

Frank was thunderstruck.

"But—but she's engaged to Prentice," he stammered.

"Never was," denied Ted. "Prentice spread that story himself to keep you away from her. When she heard of it, she flayed him alive. Forbade him ever to speak to her again. Prentice owned the whole thing up to me. The girl's yours, you idiot! Grab her!"

"Will I?" cried Frank ecstatically. "Gee, Ted, if this train was only an airplane!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### A Scoundrel Punished

The reception that Ted Scott and Frank Bruin received when they reached Lumberport passed all power of description. They were greeted almost as those who had risen from the dead.

They had wanted to avoid any public excitement, and before they had taken the train they had wired Maxwell Bruin, telling him the news but asking him to keep it quiet until they arrived.

They found the man waiting for them at the railroad station with a bear's hug for each of them and a heart overflowing with affection and delight.

"I've got a dozen parties out searching for you," he explained as soon as he could speak coherently. "I've been keeping in touch with them constantly by wireless, as each group has a radio outfit. But as the days went by and I heard no news from you I began to fear the

worst. I'll call them in now and tell them that the lost are found."

He kept them busy answering questions as the car rolled along until they came to the Wilburton house.

"I'll stop here, Dad, if you don't mind," said Frank. "You go ahead with Ted up to the house, and I'll be up there with you as soon as I can"

He ran up the path to the door, which opened before he reached it. Bessie Wilburton, eager and starry-eyed, stood framed in the doorway. Frank's arms shot out and gathered her in. Then he kicked the door shut with his heel.

Maxwell Bruin and Ted stared at each other. Then they burst out laughing.

"I guess we're not needed here," said Maxwell, as he threw in the clutch.

"No, Frank seems to be perfectly capable of handling the situation," chuckled Ted, and he went on to narrate his interview with Prentice.

The older man was delighted.

"Sweetest and cleverest girl in Lumberport," he said. "I've hoped for years that they'd marry, and I was sore as the mischief when they had that falling out. But now I can hear the wedding bells ringing. I know who'll be best man at the wedding, too," he added, as he poked Ted in the ribs.

"I'll be glad to, if Frank wants me," re-

plied Ted. "That boy of yours is sure a lucky dog."

Frank Bruin enthusiastically confirmed this view of himself when later—a good while later—he appeared, with his feet, to be sure, on the earth but his head in the clouds. He was fairly delirious with happiness. He expounded Bessie's perfections until Ted knew them by heart. Then he started all over again. And with all his eulogies Ted agreed.

Between Frank's exuberant outbursts Maxwell Bruin did manage to edge in some sober talk about the misadventure to the plane.

"So you think it wasn't an accident?" he asked of Ted.

"I'm sure it wasn't," was the reply. "The weather was fair, the wind mild, and there was nothing to strain the strength of the plane. No, some one had cunningly weakened the struts of the plane with the deliberate design of making them give way."

"It seems incredible that any one could be so devilish," remarked Mr. Bruin, with a shudder.

"It sure does," agreed Ted. "But we know they can. Remember that matter of the bomb. By the way, have the authorities found any clue to the guilty man?"

"Not the least, as far as I can learn," was the reply. "Or, if they have, they're keeping

it close. It's as much a mystery as ever. But sooner or later I hope they'll get him."

Mr. Bruin had telephoned over to the flying field, directing a plane to be sent so that Ted could be conveyed by air to Denver. It came early the next morning, and Ted was delighted when he saw Bill Twombley's head looking out of the cockpit.

After the first enthusiastic greetings nothing would do but that Bill should have all the details of the story. Ted told them, and at the end showed him the shred of cloth.

Bill started as he looked at it.

"Jump in," he said succinctly. "I've seen cloth like that before. I want to get you over to Denver before a certain party makes a getaway."

They made the journey in less than an hour, and Ted was given a rousing greeting by his friends that warmed his heart. But Felwig was not among the airmen gathered on the field.

"This way, Ted," said Bill, shouldering his way through the crowd and to the shack in which Felwig usually could be found.

They found him there, hastily gathering some effects together as though for flight.

Ted's eyes fell on the suit Felwig was wearing.

It was of dark material, brown predominating with a dull green stripe. Under one arm,

almost concealed, was a patch of slightly different shade, the size of the shred that Ted held in his hand.

"Ever see this before, Felwig?" Ted shot out at him abruptly, displaying the piece of cloth.

Felwig's face whitened as he looked at it.

"N-no," he stammered.

As though involuntarily, his hand sought the direction of the patch.

"Yes, you have," declared Ted sternly. "It was torn from your suit the night you monkeyed with my plane."

Felwig gasped, snatched the incriminating shred from Ted's hand, shot through the doorway and sped down the field like a deer toward an auto that seemed to be waiting for somebody.

Ted and Bill set out after him in hot pursuit.

A cry of warning caused them to look, and they swerved aside just in time to avoid a plane that came whizzing down the runway for a take-off.

But Felwig did not turn, nor in his eagerness to escape did he seem to hear the warning, and an instant later the plane struck him and sent him hurtling down the field, where he fell in a crumpled and unconscious heap.

They bore him to the hospital, where for a time his life was despaired of. When he be-

lieved himself about to die he made a full confession. It was he who had planted the infernal machine in the mail bag. It was he who had weakened the stays of the biplane, actuated by envy and sheer malignity against the man whom he had endeavored vainly to supplant.

But he did not die. He recovered later on only to be sentenced to a term at hard labor in prison.

Ted drew a long breath when this enemy was put beyond possibility of doing him further harm. He felt that he had had his fill of adventures. But unknown to him other adventures were coming, and what they were will be told in the next volume of this series, entitled: "First Stop Honolulu; or, Ted Scott over the Pacific." In that volume will be told much of the mystery of Ted's identity.

A delightful surprise awaited Ted when on his return to Bromville a short time after these events for a few days of well-earned rest he learned that the money he had thought lost would probably be restored to him in full.

A careful search by the receiver had revealed concealed assets that, if properly husbanded, would pay the creditors a hundred cents on the dollar. Ted was also told that the rascally members of the concern who had brought it down to ruin, faced long terms behind the bars.

Ted Scott was elated beyond words, not only

on his own account but for Mark Lawson's sake. They held a jubilation meeting, and Mark's face, so Ted declared, was "one big substantial smile."

Ted saw nothing of the Gales, but learned that the twins were going to the dogs more rapidly than ever. They kept carefully out of the young aviator's way while he remained in town.

It was in the *Hapworth* that he had come to Bromville and at the end of his stay he was grooming the gallant plane for the return. He was going directly from Bromville to Lumberport, where he was to act as best man for Frank Bruin at his marriage with Bessie Wilburton.

Ted had started the motor of the *Hapworth*, and the plane was vibrating in every fibre.

"Looks as if she couldn't wait to be off," remarked Mark Lawson, as he noted her trembling eagerness.

"That's because she's a she," replied Ted, grinning. "She knows she's going to a wedding!"

THE END

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